

RIVERS OF RESISTANCE: RAMA RESPONSES TO NICARAGUA'S GRAND CANAL

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For my mom and dad.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the effects of Nicaragua's Grand Canal plans on local politics in the community of Rama Cay, located on the southeast Atlantic Coast. While stalled, Grand Canal plans have had a major effect on grassroots politics in Nicaragua. This is especially true for the afro-indigenous Rama-Kriol community of the southeast Atlantic Coast. The Rama-Kriol Territorial Government recently agreed to lease 263-square kilometers of Rama-Kriol communal titled lands to the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Co., Ltd. I explore three cross-cutting themes to better understand this locally-contested decision: rhetoric of support for the Grand Canal, interethnic land conflict, and Rama Cay political divisions. These thematic areas produce insights on neoliberal multiculturalism, the commons, and clientelism. They also invite reflection on the challenges of actual implementation of indigenous communal title on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua.

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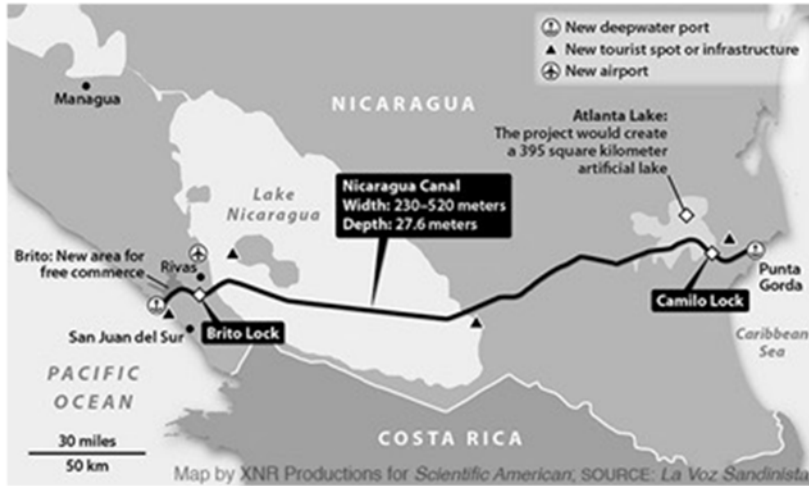


Fig. 1, Grand Canal Route

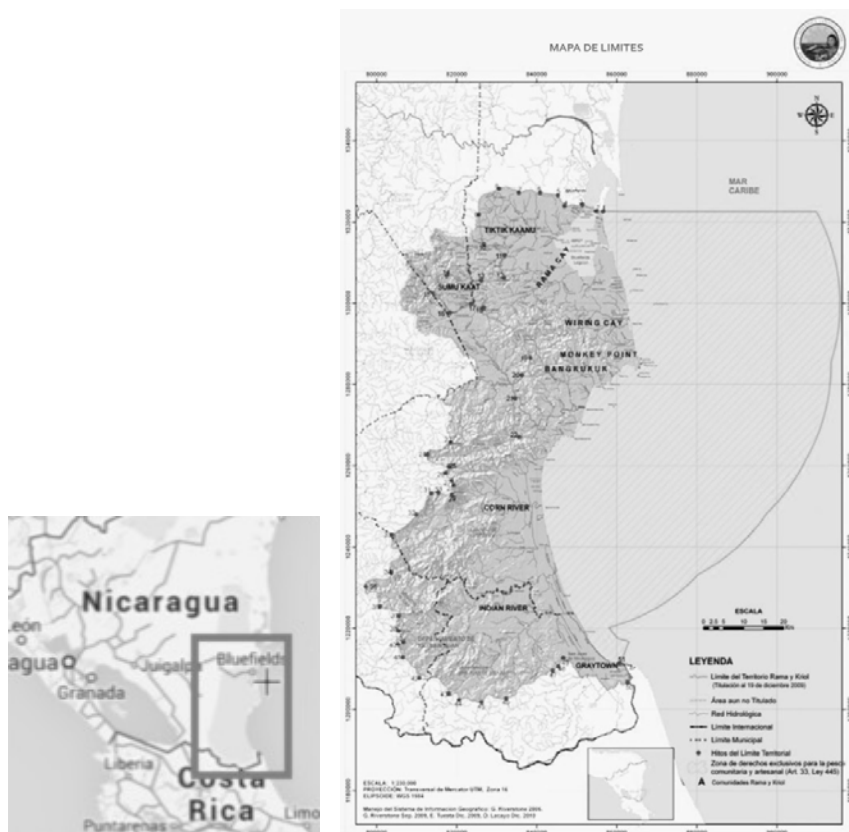


Fig. 2, Rama-Kriol Territory, Oxfam IBIS (2012)

ALPHABET SOUP

ACARIC	Association of Agricultural Clubs of the Río Coco.
ALPROMISU	Alliance for the Progress of the Miskito and Sumu.
CIDCA	Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica. Center for Investigation and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast.
CIDH	Comisión Interamericana de los Derechos Humanos. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.
CONADETI	La Comisión Nacional de Demarcación y Titulación. National Commission on Titling and Demarcation.
DIK	Deport, imprison, or kill.
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
FPIC	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.
FSLN	El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional. Sandinista National Liberation Front.
GTR-K	Gobierno Territorial Rama y Kriol. Rama-Kriol Territorial Government.
HKND	Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Co., Ltd.
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Also may refer to separate body, Inter-American Court of Human Rights.
IBIS	Oxfam Denmark.
IMF	International Monetary Fund.
MISURASATA	Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Sandinista Altogether.
PLC	El Partido Liberal Constitucionalista. The Constitutionalist Liberal Party.
PLI	El Partido Liberal Independiente. The Independent Liberal Party.

RAAN	La Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte. The North Atlantic Autonomous Region.
RAAS	La Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur. The South Atlantic Autonomous Region.
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.
UNO	La Unión Nacional Opositora. The National Opposition Union.
YATAMA	Yapti Tasba Masraka Nanih Aslatakanka. Sons of Mother Earth.

Bienvenidos a Nicaragua

I sort of stumbled into Nicaragua. Misadventures ensued. But my journey began much earlier. I became interested in indigenous peoples as a tourist at Gunung Mulu Park in Borneo. A UNESCO site. My guide was Penan, my flight over oil palm. He told me it had decimated his ancestral land. The park wasn't much better. It displaced a Penan village and absorbed them as soda-jerks and groundskeepers. We spoke in hushed voices. Park management was never far.

So much about our globalized condition struck me as strange. Gunung Mulu was a living display: Boats dumped Westerners and East Asians in a Penan village on the way to cheap cave expeditions (including myself). They (we) gawked at Karst formations near tables of handicrafts. A busload of Malay oil palm workers came seeking refuge in the jungle. They were swimming and play-fighting in a stream. The “virtuous” hand of conservation and the “ignoble” hand of capitalist exploitation played behind-the-scenes grab-ass. I didn't know what to make of it: Everything converged on this point. Our guide spoke with a pain I can never experience or describe.

I enrolled in a Master's program soon after and went to Indonesia to assist with formalizing an *adat* community's control over their forests. I then transferred to the law school, because I wanted to study the classic David v. Goliath encounters on indigenous frontiers. Law school was always Something v. Something, and a professor of mine always brought the conversation back to *Awas Tingni v. Nicaragua*. A jewel in the crown of his career and, really, developing international indigenous rights norms. It expanded property rights provisions in the American Declaration. Mandated that Nicaragua protect indigenous land rights on the Atlantic Coast. Powerful.

The policy visions underlying impact litigation like *Awes Tingni* were nice in theory. But how could they rearrange entire societies, governments, and national spaces, mired, as Nicaragua, in extreme poverty and weak rule of law? I'm reminded of Ostrom's (2014) warning about relying on metaphors as policy foundation. Many on the Atlantic Coast had come under communal title's aegis. A dubious one, because land conflict had broken out between indigenous peoples where there hadn't been conflict before. Nonindigenous colonization of indigenous territories persisted. I headed to Nicaragua to see for myself. *Awes Tingni's* clarion prescriptions belied a messy reality. An Atlantic Coast researcher, Director René Mendoza of the UCA-Nitlapán Research and Development Institute, told me the Mayangna controlled, maybe, 10% of their territory after communal title. Bilwi, where I stayed in the Miskito-Sumu north, was a minefield of unregulated economic activities, weak state presence, and on the perpetual verge of economic collapse and interethnic violence.

Then came the Grand Canal. Megadevelopment "zombie" projects (Goett, 2016)—ones that never come to fruition—are a staple on the Atlantic Coast. They frustrate local tenure security. They prime the political waters. The Grand Canal is the latest zombie borne of undead dreams, centuries old: To connect the waters of Nicaragua's Pacific and Atlantic. Two sides of a country trapped in a binomial relationship of us and them. Where full national incorporation has never been achieved. Where Atlantic Coast identities resist the debasement of *mestizaje*. The political and economic dreams of a "nation." The Atlantic Coast embodies a centuries-long battle for space, playing host to ever-evolving ideologies of state control and local autonomy.

At heart, this thesis is about my nascent curiosities at Gunung Mulu: The weird, uneasy convergence of so many things in space. Heterotopias. The Atlantic Coast is similar: Diverse agents flow together like tributaries, rivers of resistance, producing turbulence, new states of being, and becoming. Grand Canal politics on Rama Cay provide a lens on this turbulent flow.¹ In what follows, I provide the basic context, research questions, methods of this thesis, and chart its course.

¹ Without committing myself to any definition of space, I find Massey's (2005) propositions about space at least relevant to this metaphor: Space is constituted through interrelations; is an assemblage of trajectories; and under constant construction.

CHAPTER I. HEADWATERS

Spanish conquistadores in the 16th Century were the first to imagine Nicaragua as a trade bridge between Pacific and Atlantic maritime routes (Wade, 2016). This idea lingered like the undead. American industrialists, the Nicaraguan state, and multinational investors have all played “Herbert West—Reanimator” to the idea: Wet canals, dry canals, oleoducts, high-speed rail, deep-water ports, and related subprojects intended to capture a slice of the maritime-trade pie (see Mueller, 2001). The current “Grand Canal” megaproject is a 172-mile interoceanic wet canal from Brito on the Pacific Ocean to Punta Gorda in Rama-Kriol territory [fig. 1]. The 50-year extendable concession belongs to the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Group (HKND). HKND is in the process of securing land rights to the Canal route under the Master Concession and Implementation Agreement, formalized under Law 840.

Budgeted at \$50 billion USD, the Canal includes multiple subprojects, including an international airport, tourism infrastructure, and a deep-water port along its route (see HKND, 2015). Many have speculated that the Grand Canal is effectively dead. Not much construction has happened (Daley, 2016). Besides, it may not be economically (see White, 2015) or ecologically viable (Gross, 2014; Meyer & Huete-Pérez, 2014; Huete-Pérez et al., 2015; for a dissenting view, see Condit, 2015). But, as Suzanne Daley reported in *The New York Times* in 2016, even stalled, project critics are becoming more “outspoken and organized.” As Jennifer Goett (2016) suggests, megaprojects do not have to exist, strictly, to have an impact: 65% of megaprojects never reach fruition. The Grand Canal may never happen, but this is little comfort for the Nicaraguans who experience insecurity, conflict,

and fear in its shadow. Goett (2016) dubs the constantly-reanimated Grand Canal a “zombie megaproject.”

52% of the Canal will pass through Rama-Kriol communal titled lands. By HKND’s own assessment, the Canal will have a major, negative impact on the culture and livelihoods of Ramas and Kriols (see HKND, 2015). Even in zombie form, recent news suggests that the Canal has made it difficult for those living in the canal impact zone to apply for house and land-improvement loans (Larios, 2017). As Herlihy (2016) suggests, Canal plans have also created the promise of jobs and contributed to a spike in land-colonist emigration. Its most observable effects in Rama-Kriol territory are, so far, political, the thrust of my inquiry.

Rama Geography, Origins, and Lifeways

The Ramas and Kriols of the southeast Atlantic Coast are a small community with a large territory. They number approximately 1,900 people and have communal title to 4,608 square-kilometers, roughly half of which is land and half territorial sea [fig. 2] (Acosta, 2010). This extends from just south of Bluefields in the North, to the community of Greytown in the South, near the Costa Rican border. This territory has a wide variety of ecosystems, including beach-plant communities, coastal lagoons, mangrove swamps, and lowland tropical forests (Riverstone, 2004). It also encompasses four major natural reserves: The Cerro Silva Natural Reserve, the Indio-Maíz Biological Reserve, The Punta Gorda Natural Reserve, and The Río San Juan Wildlife Refuge. The Indio-Maíz lays claim to some of the best-protected tropical flora and fauna in all Central America (Nygren, 2004).

Ramas descend from Chibcha-speaking peoples from northern South America and possess mixed European, Mesoamerican, and Afro-descendant ancestry (Melton et al., 2013; Coe, 2008; Pineda, 2006). Historical accounts afford little about their arrival on the Coast, ethnogenesis, or why Ramas settled on Rama Cay in the 18th Century (Loveland, 1975). Early ethnographic research on the Ramas is also sparse (e.g., Lehmann, 1914, 1920; Conzemius, 1927; Loveland, 1975). Historical accounts and official British records only use the ethnonym Rama from about the 17th or 18th Century (Loveland, 1975). Coast Indians and Kriols mostly avoided European settler colonization and colonial documentation and identification (Pineda, 2006), and they remained isolated from anthropological studies until the beginning of the 20th Century (Baldi, 2013).

The Rama traditionally perform swidden agriculture, fish, hunt, and forage (Coe, 2008) over a large, contiguous land area. Agriculture typically takes place along the relatively fertile, boat-accessible rivers and creeks (Riverstone, 2004). Settlements are traditionally groups of 40 to 300 individuals with an average 40 to 50 kilometers in between, which the Spanish referred to as *parcialidades* (app., “cliques”) (Baldi, 2013). Each Rama village has communal agricultural lands. Space and biophysical constraints prevent cultivation on Rama Cay, apart from fruit trees. Rama Cay residents therefore maintain agricultural plots and secondary houses on the mainland, in Western Hill and along the Kukra, Torsuani, and Dakuno Rivers. Ramas in mainland villages usually have small (~2 hectare) swidden plots interspersing their primary residences (Riverstone, 2004). Use-rights to lands and trees are heritable and transmitted orally. Interviewees report cultivating rice, beans, dasheen, cassava, breadkine (bananas), coconuts, and other crops suited to tropical climes.

Ramas fish for a wide variety of species in streams, rivers, the lagoon, and the sea, including fresh and saltwater fish, shellfish, turtles, sharks, and manatees. They use pangas (fiber boats) and *dories* (wooden canoes) equipped with outboard motors or, in the latter case, with sails. They use nets, harpoons, hooks, and lines to capture marine species. Ramas hunt a wide variety of terrestrial animals with guns and, more traditionally, lances and arrows. The most common hunted animal is *wary* (wild pig). Ramas forage for medicinal plants, construction materials, firewood, and charcoal for sale (Riverstone, 2004) in the forest.

Ramas have mostly retained a subsistence lifestyle. Rama Cay residents live in vicinage support networks that produce subsistence goods for their members and channel surpluses into island and regional economies, earning a small monetary income. Members of these networks may have salaried jobs with the government, work *chamba* (day labor), or obtain wage labor in the broader region, country, or in other countries, remitting monies to family members. Reported social and environmental pressures on the land, natural resources, and cultural changes correlate to a perceived decline in traditional livelihood activities. Many Rama Cay residents have incorporated elements of non-traditional diets, and some now engage in animal husbandry, particularly of cattle, a recent development.

Leadership Structure

An informal council of elders oversaw the Rama territory before the GTR-K came into being (Riverstone, 2004). When pressed, interviewees, even elders and leaders, shared or could recall very little about old customary authorities and law. The Moravian Church has had parallel moral and political authority since the late 19th Century (cf. Loveland,

1975; Baldi, 2013). The Rama Moravian Pastor remains a source of informal authority on Rama Cay, although this may be slowly changing (see Chapter IV).

Since regional and territorial decentralization under Law 28 (1987) and Law 445 (2002), Ramas have become integrated into the RAAS regional government and began creating the precursor to the current Rama-Kriol Territorial Government (GTR-K) in the early 2000s. The national communal titling agency (CONADETI) established under Law 445 (2002) after *Awes Tingni* (2001) faced significant fiscal constraints due to national funding priorities, so the nascent GTR-K and outside funding agencies, notably Oxfam IBIS, were instrumental in demarcating Rama-Kriol territory (see Gonzalez, 2016). The resulting Rama-Kriol territory came under deed of communal title in 2009, and the GTR-K became a formal governing body.

The Rama-Kriol communal title incorporates nine communities—Rama Cay, Sumu Kaat, Tiktik Kaanu, Wiring Cay, Bangkukuk, Indian River, Monkey Point, Corn River, and Greytown [fig. 2]. The latter three are predominantly Afro-descendant Creoles (Kriol), totaling some 450 people (GTR-K, 2007). Rama-Kriol formal leadership now consists of two counselors (*concejales*) in the RAAS, a single GTR-K representative from each of the nine communities, a GTR-K President, several non-political GTR-K positions, and a board of communal leaders in each village communal government. Some Ramas also occupy bureaucratic positions in peripheral agencies, such as CONADETI. The following figure illustrates the hierarchy of governance in Rama-Kriol territory:

Autonomous Structure
National Government
Regional Government (RAAS/RAAN)
Territorial Government (GTR-K)
Communal Government (e.g., Rama Cay)

Territorial politicians and other officials fall into Liberal (PLC, PLI) and Sandinista (FSLN) political factions and alliances. As I discuss at greater length in Chapter IV, Liberal politicians rarely express party affiliations. Sandinista officials belong to the FSLN party structure, however, which has become the dominant player in national politics. Liberals' ambivalent party connections may be the result of the Liberal retreat from national politics, and Sandinistas' growing efforts to disempower Liberals at the regional and territorial level in the RAAS, a traditional Liberal stronghold.

Watershed: Research Overview

Megaprojects are monuments to the sublime: the rapture of politicians, engineers, business people, and trade unions. And trait-making, because they aggressively restructure societies (Flyvbjerg, 2014). But they don't have to exist, strictly, to have an effect or become enrolled to people's ends. The Grand Canal is a law, a concession, a document, a pledge, an expectation prefiguring calamity, prosperity, or *meh*. It depends on whom you ask. The idea of the Canal interacts with and transforms existing social relations. I seek to understand this dynamic in Rama-Kriol territory. I draw on literatures of neoliberalization, the commons, and clientelism, dividing this analysis into three levels:

1. The rhetoric of access and control. Rama-Kriol communal title has formalized territorial control. Despite its failures, it produces a minimum expectation of state and agent responsibility toward Ramas. How do Ramas conceive of and use these “spaces of recognition” (Hale, 2005) in the wake of Grand Canal plans? I ask:
 - a. How do Ramas understand the meaning of territory?
 - b. What does the government provide in the way of title enforcement?
 - c. How do GTR-K leaders and Canal supporters reconcile desires for ethnoterritorial control and the Grand Canal?
2. Ramas’ relationship with outsiders in their territory. Land contests between indigenous peoples and land colonists are extensive on the Atlantic Coast (see Herlihy, 2016) and in the Rama-Kriol territory (GTR-K, 2007). This sets the scene for interactions between Ramas and all other outsiders, with implications for the ways Ramas perceive and use their territory. I ask:
 - a. What are Rama attitudes toward land colonists in their territory?
 - b. How do Ramas engage with land colonists in daily life?
 - c. How have officials attempted to make and secure promises with land colonists in the territory?
 - d. What are the physical and institutional limitations on interaction?
3. Poverty, distributive politics, and political mobilization. Communities react to large-scale land acquisitions in internally differentiated ways, because some benefit

and others do not. Ramas are poor and exist in a broader political culture of clientelist exchange. How does this impact political mobilization with respect to the Grand Canal? I ask:

- a. What is the nature of public resource distribution on Rama Cay?
- b. Who receives public resources? Who does not?
- c. How do these individuals react to the Canal, local leadership, those in favor of the Canal, and those against?

This framework of analysis reveals how the Grand Canal interacts with and transforms a dynamic, historical and political landscape. I organize my chapters around each level of analysis, beginning at the outermost: rhetoric in support of the Grand Canal, conflictive interactions in the territory, and Rama Cay politics (outlined below).

Man with a Method

I undertook preliminary fieldwork between July and August of 2015 in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) prior to joining UH Manoa, networking with local civil society representatives and researchers. This continued remotely throughout the '15-16 academic year. I then changed focus from land conflict in the RAAN to the Grand Canal in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS), where I conducted research between June and August of 2016. I had few contacts in the RAAS, but leveraged my connections at the Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Center in Tucson, Arizona to meet with a Miskito lawyer from the RAAN, who introduced me to key members of the Rama-Kriol Grand Canal opposition. A colleague at an American NGO in León, Nicaragua facilitated a meeting with a prominent Sandinista official before I undertook fieldwork on the Atlantic Coast.

I conducted qualitative research on Rama Cay, including semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, direct observation, collection of official and other documents, and archival research at the GTR-K and CIDCA library in Bluefields. I primarily resided on Rama Cay from June 25th to July 25th, 2016, but spent some time in the nearby city of Bluefields to conduct archival research and key informant interviews. All told, I conducted 33 semi-structured interviews with 27 individuals, 9 of whom were female and 18 of whom were male. Because many interview questions dealt with land, livelihoods, and politics, some women demurred, declared little or no knowledge, or declined to comment. The gendered division of labor on Rama Cay is such that women rarely manage land or engage in territorial livelihood activities such as hunting, fishing, or foraging, and tend to run the affairs of the household. Some would defer to the man present in the household.² I therefore have more male interviewees.

I took notes on responses and other contextual information during semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and direct observation. I took verbatim notes of responses I found particularly compelling, especially in triangulation with what I had learned up to then. I also took notes of informal conversations and direct observations. I took photographic evidence of certain maps, official, and interviewee documents. I secured the express consent of interviewees on information gathering and recording methods during formal and informal conversations and direct observation. I obtained oral consent from interviewees due to the sensitivity of gathering signatures from indigenous peo-

² In one case, a man constantly interrupted my interview with the women in his household to contradict and correct the record as he saw it. Women of the household tend to be relegated to an inferior position of knowledge on important issues. This became difficult to navigate given the number of men who were present during the study period, the fishing season, when men return from their secondary agricultural residences located on the mainland to Rama Cay.

ples. Most interviewees were incredibly generous with their time, open, and happy to discuss the issues at hand. Semi-structured interviews typically took between one-half to two hours.

I exclude any potential identifying information from the data, altering names and identifying information. The exception is public figures, whom I name. I remove identifying information from wholly off-record or intensely personal public figure data, or when revealing their identity could harm non-public acquaintances or kin. I take seriously the ramifications this information could have for interviewees; personal, political, and otherwise. The stakes are high. The price to pay is often the ultimate one, particularly for those who actively oppose the Grand Canal. The statistics are sobering: In 2014 alone, 116 activists were murdered globally for resisting extractives and megaprojects, 40% of whom were indigenous, and three-quarters of whom were from Central and South America (Global Witness, 2015).

Given this broader, hostile climate, I conducted my research without the knowledge or consent of relevant central government, RAAS, or GTR-K authorities. I did not seek the consent of GTR-K authorities, because they were predominantly Sandinista (FSLN) party operators who were hostile to outsider research on the Grand Canal. In or around the time I was on the Coast, the central government arrested, maltreated (alleged), and deported around five individuals from multiple countries, including human rights workers, journalists, and one academic, for researching Grand Canal issues. The US State Department issued a relevant travel warning while I was on Rama Cay. My inability to approach many FSLN territorial and regional authorities presented challenges to relationship-building with them or their loyalists. The Liberal Canal opposition were the most

welcoming of me, hosting me and bringing me into their social sphere. Despite the potential appearance of partisanship, I remained consciously neutral, and I was careful to emphasize my neutrality to Liberals and to build trust as to my neutrality and motives with Sandinista partisans.

Everybody's Got Choices:³ Studying Rama Cay

Rama Cay is one of the nine communities incorporated under the Rama-Kriol communal title. It is a small island in Bluefields Lagoon, roughly 15 kilometers from the main South Atlantic Autonomous Region (Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur, RAAS) city of Bluefields [fig. 3]. An estimated 60%-80%⁴ of Ramas live here. I was present on Rama Cay during the fishing months, when residents return from secondary agricultural residences on the mainland and its permanent population is at maximum. I chose to study Rama Cay due to time, resource, and study-length constraints. As the most populous Rama community, the range of viewpoints is plausibly greater, and residents have an observed, outsized influence on Rama-Kriol territorial politics. Central figures of the Canal resistance and Sandinista leadership live and are from here. Travel to Rama Cay was also easier. The other eight communities lack communal boat service (as does Rama Cay, but travel is more frequent) and require a day or more of riverine or ocean travel, ranging in the hundreds of US dollars.

With Rama Cay as my focus, my sole concern is those who identify as Rama. Conspicuously missing are Kriols. The territory is, after all, the "Rama-Kriol" territory. The

³ This is a reference to the popular hip-hop track by E-40, entitled, "Choices (Yup)," which portrays life as indeterminate, consisting of a series of free choices that weigh on the development of the individual and any of his or her endeavors.

⁴ Population data are conflicting. See e.g., Coe, 2008; Acosta, 2010; GTR-K, 2007.

Kriol struggle exists in parallel to Ramas', but apart in many ways. Rama-Kriol political dynamics and racial tensions are salient features of territorial politics. Ramas have representational advantages—they are six of the nine communities and have controlled the GTR-K presidency since its inception—and so dominate territorial politics. Time, resource, data, and space constraints therefore place Kriols outside the scope of this research. I now realize, however, that I become a de facto participant in a legacy of Black erasure on the Atlantic Coast by focusing on representationally-advantaged Indian voices (cf. Hooker, 2005). For this, apologies are not enough. Particularly for the Kriol people and leadership of Monkey Point, who struggle in the shadow of the Grand Canal on equal-if-unique terms to the Rama. In the future, I will do better to correct these biases at the outset, when they can be addressed.

River's Flow

I divide this thesis into five chapters. Chapter II, *Canaleamiento*, is about rhetoric in support of the Grand Canal that views it as a territorial strategy. This rhetoric represents a merger of neoliberal and multicultural ideologies. I thus provide a history of the development of multicultural rights frameworks in Nicaragua, neoliberal economic policy, and their nascent articulation as neoliberal multiculturalism at Nicaragua's post-neoliberal crossroads. I then describe the ways in which Rama identities show signs of transformation alongside the contemporaneous production of neoliberal and multicultural space in Rama-Kriol territory. I finally discuss how this manifests in rhetoric viewing the Grand Canal as surrogate state power; a way to evict land colonists from heavily-settled areas, thus restoring the land's value to Ramas.

Chapter III, *Pueblo Chico, Infierno Grande*, is about the history of patronage politics on the Atlantic Coast and how clientelist politics on Rama Cay contribute to divided community responses to the Grand Canal. I overview the political context of clientelism, the Nicaraguan Revolution, decentralization, and the emergence of clientelism and political fracture on Rama Cay. I next discuss the history of intra-clan conflict on Rama Cay, the operation of clans as Liberal and Sandinista brokerage networks, and the ways in which poverty and levels of access to public and private resources mobilize these networks to employ clientelist or programmatic political strategies.

Chapter IV, *Geographies of Trust*, focuses on Rama land conflict with land colonists. I provide a history of confrontation over space, colonist emigration, and attendant land reforms. I discuss Rama-Kriol authorities' failed attempts to dictate land uses to land colonists. I next consider limits on cooperation in the absence of strong enforcement mechanisms, namely a pervasive situation of low trust. Contributors to low trust are historically-situated stereotypes of land colonists; the geographic emplacement of stereotypes, as patterns of interaction mediate them; the influence of spatial proximity on social proximity; and the costs of interface and enforcement. A metaphorical "heat map," or "geography of trust," emerges that underlines the land and livelihood fragmentation prefiguring the emergence of ethnoterritorialism in rhetoric supporting the Grand Canal (Ch. III) and clientelist politics on Rama Cay (Ch. IV).

Chapter V, *River's End*, reflects on this thesis in its entirety. I consider the moral dimensions of communal title, particularly the "too much for too few" problem Anthony Stocks (2005) poses. I conclude with policy recommendations for improving cooperation in Rama-Kriol territory, and I finish with future avenues for research.

CHAPTER III. ¡CANALEAMIENTO YA!⁵ THE GRAND CANAL AS SAVIOR OF RAMA

LANDS

S. James Anaya's lectures were always understated. He'd arrive punctually and barely smile as he set his lecture materials down on the podium. He'd speak without affect. His mind was a currency counter. His oration was much as his writing: His placement of words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs was fastidious. Precise to the small fibers. Practiced, emergent. His argumentation flawless. What I remember most was his air of impatience. Urgency. He could maybe see things more clearly than others. I could imagine him imploring heads of state to become true moderns with the same urgency. The answer was staring them in the face: Indigenous peoples are no longer at the margins; ignore them at your peril.

Jim was a UN indigenous rapporteur who cut his teeth as co-counsel on a heavyweight international precedent, *Awas Tingni v. Nicaragua* (2001), alongside famed Nicaraguan human rights defender María Luisa Acosta. It was a fight between the Mayangna people from the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and a Korean logging firm that ended up before the Inter-American Court. Anaya and co-counsels' "audacious strategy" was to extend the American Convention's property protections to collective subjects (Hale, 2005: 14). His monolingual Indian clients sat across from the besuited moderns of the state and bench. Jim's tour de force was his use of irony, when he challenged the theories of recalcitrant

⁵ "Canalification now!" My variation on *¡Saneamiento Ya!* (Title clearance now!), a refrain among indigenous advocacy groups (e.g., CEJUDHCAN) that want the government to fulfill its responsibilities to resolve conflicting non-indigenous claims to communal titled lands under Law 445 through *saneamiento* (clearance) of title procedures.

state lawyers as backward, “according to the *modern* criteria of the *modern* approach, reflected in *modern* judicial instruments” (Hale, 2005: 15).

Anaya brought the multicultural state into the courtroom. It had been incubating for several decades in international norms. The judges’ resounding support for the Mayangna was ahead of its time. Six years passed before the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) came into being. Even more than UNDRIP, *Awás Tingni* was binding upon a country. A beacon in a decades-long struggle for multicultural rights; a countermovement against assimilationist, high-modern state building (see Dove, 2006). Its broader outlines go back in history, however. The Dutch, for example, implemented collective tenure in the East Indies to prevent land dispossession among those they viewed as incompetent market subjects (Li et al., 2010). Indigenous rights also envision safe operating spaces for otherness to guard against market depredations (Li et al., 2010). Inalienable collective tenure is the root intervention structuring Anaya’s modern, multicultural heterotopia.

But how do collective land rights fare? I often wondered this. A wide gulf exists between theories upon which legal victories are based and their actual implementation. *Awás Tingni* hoped to promote political and economic inclusion for Atlantic Coast indigenous and Creole peoples, but land conflict among indigenous groups soon followed. Soon after the implementing legislation, Law 445, came into effect, the Mayangna and Miskito began contesting historically-fluid customary boundaries (Alvarado, 2007; Finley-Brooke & Offen, 2009). Uncontrolled emigration and investor activity on indigenous lands persists. In some cases, low-intensity warfare has broken out between indigenous peoples and land colonists (Herlihy, 2016).

Rama-Kriol communal title, which the community achieved in 2009, has similarly done little to secure Ramas and Kriols against persistent tenure insecurity. A lack of state backing and enforcement has left Rama-Kriol decision makers reassessing how they can effectuate their communal property regime. The Grand Canal itself has emerged as a strategy to assert territorial control in parts of Rama-Kriol territory: To evict land colonists from a densely settled and transformed area, and thus to restore its value. Hale (2005: 20) takes the view that neoliberalism “domesticates” radical indigenous politics by providing limited spaces of recognition. Kymlicka (2013) is more hopeful. Indigenous groups throughout the world have used both their political power as multicultural subjects and their market power as neoliberal subjects to advance their agendas. The truth is somewhere in between, in this case.

Ramas and Kriols have very little effective power against the Grand Canal, a national interest. However, leadership and Grand Canal supporters perceive having some power to extract revenues against a big corporation from their property entitlements. Diminishing access to other livelihood sources makes this especially attractive (see also Chapter IV). In addition, the Grand Canal impact zone includes one of the largest land colonist settlements in the territory, Punta Gorda, whose inhabitants have little or no formal claim of occupancy. These land colonists would have to move. Leadership can thus advance central goals of the land rights agenda through the Grand Canal: to exercise powers of exclusion and to extract value from the land. They enlist the Grand Canal to their own ends, as much as it enlists them to a neoliberal project *par excellence*.

My intention in this chapter is to understand how structural logics unfold on Rama Cay. In so doing, I further consider a key point of articulation between neoliberalization and multicultural citizenship; not merely in rhetoric, but in how Ramas come to

view themselves. In what follows, I provide an extended political history of the Atlantic Coast region with broader relevance to the rest of this thesis. I chart the history of identity politics and multicultural rights reforms in Nicaragua; the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s and 2000s; and finally discuss the articulation of neoliberal and multicultural ideologies in rhetoric of support for the Grand Canal, and in perceptions of what it means to be Rama.

Chronology: Mercury Forward, in Retrograde

Mercury. Bluefield's god is Mercury. Its daytime streets are thick with humidity. Jungle plants flow over the fences. Spanish, Miskito, and Creole are a dissonance that demand resolution. Pink morning mists on the lagoon are gray by afternoon. An illicit trade bristles in the barrios at night, but Bluefield's daytime stock in trade is out on the main thoroughfares. Fish come from stained buckets. Mangoes and coconuts can be found in their meager spread in the folds of blankets on the wagons of skinny horses. The day's vegetables wrinkle in the heat. Chinese merchants hawk plastic sundries. Traders at the dock sit at the edge of currents that carry the occasional white lobster, or cocaine brick, ashore. A ticket out of this misery. The ghosts of English pirate ships wander the blue plain, alongside commercial vessels, dories, and pangas. Portrero and plantations stipple the lowland tropical forest, and the agricultural frontier advances everywhere. You hear that a gang of men took a Rama's head when they stole his land. Such mercuriality is felt everywhere. Life on the southeast Atlantic Coast is a game of survival, uncertainty. The daily fight for resources is Latin America writ large.

As Eduardo Galeano (1973: 59) has said, "The Indians have suffered, and continue to suffer, the curse of their own wealth; that is the drama of all Latin America." Encounters

by local people with colonial powers in Latin America have produced long histories of resource exploitation and grassroots countermovements to regain what was lost (Ludlow et al., 2016). Some of the most potent contemporary grassroots movements are those that identify as indigenous. Indigeneity is a novel concept with core grievances that grew alongside the “new agrarianism” of the neoliberal era (Renfrew, 2011: 581; Ludlow et al., 2016). Some scholars argue neoliberalism and indigeneity have the same parentage (e.g., Zizek, 1997). Post-World War II globalization gradually underwrote neoliberal forms of governance and capitalist exploitation (Kotz, 2002). New encounters by frontier communities with the modern world led to tribal identity formation (see Dove et al., 2006). World society, in turn, provided pathways for indigeneity’s dissemination, recognition, and mechanisms of redress (Hirtz, 2003).

Although struggle over cultural meaning is nothing new in indigenous societies, identity politics are prominent in the neoliberal era, eroding the national-popular project by making claims to, “separate rights, histories, and identities,” in effect, “dis-articulating...modernizing nation-state projects at global, regional, and local scales” (Hale, 1997: 573; Clifford, 2004: 9). The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is a case study in these larger trends. Indigenous countermovements in the 1980s, successor movements in the 1990s-era of neoliberal reforms, and the Sandinista return to national politics in the 2000s have brought Nicaragua to a post-neoliberal crossroads (cf. Escobar, 2010). This history has set the stage for the market’s overtures toward domesticating multicultural rights, and vice versa, in Rama-Kriol territory.

Multiculturalism, Run

British colonial, US imperial, and *Somocista* eras (the 18th to mid-20th centuries) brought outsider resource exploitation and a loss of autonomy to the Atlantic Coast in ascending degrees (see Sollis, 1989; Ortiz, 1987). Ever since the Atlantic Coast's incorporation into the Nicaraguan state in 1894, its, "peoples...have struggled to regain autonomy" (Ortiz, 1987: 47). They remained isolated from the central government, however, until gradual state and *mestizo* encroachment occurred under the Somoza dictatorship (1937-1979) in the 1950s and 1960s (Sollis, 1989). Mass indigenous organizations ACARIC (1967-1974) and ALPROMISU (1974-1979) formed to manage the developing relationship between *costeños* and the Somoza regime. ACARIC and ALPROMISU sought assimilation into the Nicaraguan state under a civil rights framework, a political ideology known as *indigenismo*, then in vogue internationally (Meringer, 2010: 2014).

The Sandinista Revolution in 1979 brought new opportunities to renegotiate *costeño* citizenship. A new organization, MISURASATA (1979-1987), formed at an ALPROMISU meeting in 1979 (Ortiz, 1987). They discredited ALPROMISU as lacking revolutionary credentials, and they further set out to distinguish MISURASATA as a fourth world movement that rejected *indigenismo* in favor of the more modish, exclusive Indian rights (Meringer, 2014). They underwent a period of ethnogenesis during their early formation (Meringer, 2010). Mounting dissatisfaction with the Sandinistas in the wake of the early 1980s recession and MISURASATA's growing pan-Indigenism set MISURASATA and Sandinista authorities on a collision course. MISURASATA began demanding political and territorial separation from the central government (Ortiz, 1987). This did not square with

the Sandinistas' national-popular program (Hooker, 2005). Sandinistas would not concede to these demands, so MISURASATA joined the Contra insurgency in 1981 (Arraiza, 2015).

MISURASATA embodied a shift from *indigenismo* to multicultural rights, believing assimilation to be the cause of cultural dismemberment. They attracted the attention and support of major international actors, including the Indian Law Resource Center and Harvard's Cultural Survival, the anti-communist religious right, and the US Congress and CIA (Meringer, 2010). Their ethnogenesis, territorial demands, and transnationalism marked their entry into the new agrarian era of social movements (cf. Renfrew, 2011). They gained legitimacy both at home and abroad. This made them a formidable threat. Seeking an end to years of counterrevolutionary violence, and facing an indomitable indigenous political insurgency, the Sandinistas granted the Atlantic Coast regional autonomy, and further ratified groundbreaking indigenous communal land rights provisions in the 1987 Constitution (Sollis, 1989).

Former MISURASATA leadership admits to not knowing what "the famous Indian rights [*la famosa* Indian Raitka]" were at the organization's inception (Meringer, 2010: 11). They had tapped into a growing transnational indigenous consensus that advocated territorial autonomy within states under a pluricultural rights agenda, gradually coming to understand Indian rights in terms of ethnic territorial claims (Van Cott, 2001; Meringer, 2010). Regional autonomy proved to be a major step in this direction, but the regional governments proved unable to stem the tide of post-revolutionary migration and foreign direct investment (FDI) during the height of 1990s neoliberal reform (Arraiza, 2015; see also, Herlihy, 2016; Enríquez, 2010). It was in this political-economic context that indigenous mobilization recommenced and began to demand a communitarian model of ethnic rights, going beyond the pluriethnic/liberal regional autonomy model (Gonzalez, 2016).

Liberal Redux

Both Sandinista and Indian politics were rooted in a struggle for greater democratic inclusion after centuries of colonialism and tyranny (Close, 1999). They began, however, from conflicting conceptions of inclusion and governance. Sandinistas believed all Nicaraguans to be *mestizos* united in class struggle, as democratic citizens with individual rights, and that the state existed to defend all the poor and marginalized (Close, 1999). MISURASATA saw exclusive, collective rights as key to Indian inclusion, believing that the state should defend not one, but multiple histories and identities (Van Cott, 2001; Hale, 1997). A third conception of democratic governance emerged after the Sandinista electoral defeat in 1990. US-backed conservatives promoted a model of government based on liberal capitalism and rule of law, placing a greater emphasis on self-determination through the market (see Close, 1999). Government would only nominally defend the poor, marginalized, or historically distinct. Their role would be, instead, to enable the free market.

Nicaragua's neoliberal turn was, at heart, counterrevolutionary (Close, 1999). President Chamorro and her successors promoted property rights, free markets, and free trade through structural adjustments. These cut education, health, and agriculture programs, privatized state-owned industry and banking, liberalized trade, devalued the national currency, and prioritized foreign direct investment in extractives and megadevelopment (Enríquez, 2010; Herlihy, 2016; Goett, 2016). Structural adjustment dismantled key progressive reforms of the Sandinista Revolution. Along with the, “unmistakable introduction of market capitalism in Cuba,” Nicaragua’s neoliberalization left no ideological alternative to neoliberalism standing in Latin America (Hale, 2002: 486). All that was left in Nicaragua

was the skeleton of democratic institutions that Sandinistas had created (Booth & Richards, 2006).

Rural people suffered during this period. Large numbers of smallholders began making distress sales of land, becoming land renters, wage labor, or self-employed (Ruben & Massett, 2003; Enríquez, 2010). Many migrated to the relatively unpopulated Atlantic Coast at the government's encouragement (Herlihy, 2016; Arraiza, 2015). Post-revolutionary land redistribution to ex-combatants (Abu-Lughod, 2000), FDI (Herlihy, 2016), and economic policy prioritizing lobster and timber exports on the Atlantic Coast (Arraiza, 2015), intensified migration. The march of capital and its discontents led to violent frontier warfare among developers, colonists, and indigenous peoples, a phenomenon seen in other neoliberal contexts in Latin America (see Renfrew, 2011; Perz et al., 2008; Caldas et al., 2007). Cartographic-legal strategies in the courtroom did much more, however, than new rounds of violence in the jungles to advance the indigenous cause (Wainwright & Bryan, 2009). World society was coming of age on multicultural rights (Hale, 2002).

Multiculturalism is Rich?

In an Art of Solidarity⁶ documentary short entitled *Bangkukuk*, a Rama man muses on the community's conflict with the Grand Canal:

If the government wants to bring war, I ready to. Them have plenty army.
But we poor people, we are fighting a different way. With documents, pencil, and paper. And that is what I am basing it on. My own right.

Although Nicaragua's afro-indigenous peoples gained rights to communal lands in 1987, the regional and central governments provided no means of titling those lands (Anaya, 2002). Economic policies in the 1990s encouraged Atlantic Coast exports, including timber

⁶*Art of Solidarity* is a non-profit founded by Nicaraguan artists based in Baltimore, Maryland.

(Arraiza, 2015), which led to a fateful legal showdown between the central government and the Mayangna people of Awas Tingni. This produced national legal reforms that gave substance to Nicaragua's constitutional commitment to protect communal property rights. The pen had proven mightier than the sword.

When the Nicaraguan government granted a 93,000-hectare concession to a Korean logging firm on Mayangna lands in 1995, the community disputed the concession under communal property rights and other provisions of Nicaraguan law (Anaya, 2002). The case wound up before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 1998. The Court found on behalf of the Mayangnas in 2001 (Anaya, 2002). It became, "the first judgment by an international tribunal to recognize the communal property rights of indigenous peoples and to also mandate a state to protect those rights" (Alvarado, 2007: 609). The most far-reaching aspect of the decision was the Court's expansion of Article 21 on property in the American Convention to include communal property as defined by customary tenure (Anaya, 2002). This transformed property into a, "culturally sanctioned occupation" (Hale, 2005: 14). Nicaragua was now under the directive of a binding legal decision to demarcate and title indigenous communal lands on the Atlantic Coast.

Nicaragua enacted Law 445⁷ on communal property in 2003, mandating a legislative or administrative mechanism to demarcate indigenous communal lands in response to *Awas Tingni* and under pressure from the World Bank (Alvarado, 2007; for more on multilateral agencies' role, see Anthias & Radcliffe, 2015). Per Alvarado, early demarcation in Awas Tingni accompanied conflict over abutting indigenous land claims. Nicaragua had

⁷ Ley No. 445, 13 Dec. 2002, Ley del Régimen de Propiedad Comunal de los Pueblos Indígenas y Comunidades Étnicas de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua y de los Ríos Bocay, Coco, Indio y Maíz [Law of the Communal Property Regime of Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and of the Bocay, Coco, Indio, and Maíz Rivers], Ley No. 445, La Gaceta [L.G.] No. 16, 23 Jan. 2003 (Nicar.), available at <http://www.elaw.org/resources/text.asp?ID=1516>.

not discharged its responsibilities under Law 445 as of Alvarado's writing, and this remains so. The Ramas and neighboring Kriols of the southeast Atlantic Coast obtained joint communal title under Law 445 in 2009. Titling stalled at the title clearance stage of implementation, *saneamiento*, —a common phenomenon throughout the Atlantic Coast (González, 2016)—due to the continued influx of land colonists from Pacific and interior departments. The central government's encouragement of land colonization, insufficient funding for the titling and demarcation body CONADETI (Alvarado, 2007), and abdication of their responsibility to render assistance during *saneamiento* has frustrated Rama-Kriol enjoyment of communal title.

Communal title falls short of expectations in other ways. Law 445 protects against the exploitation of communal property without consent (Alvarado, 2007). The subnational nature of ethnoterritorial rights inherently limits consent, however. Judicial conventions on free, prior, and informed consent give space to "compelling national interests" (Cariño & Colchester, 2010). Courts such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights⁸ use the "compelling interest" test to resolve tensions between the rights of individuals, severally as a "nation" with "interests" (the right to development), and the collective rights and interests of subnational entities or individuals (FPIC). Law 445 and international norms, therefore, do not categorically protect Ramas against megaprojects like the Grand Canal, except to provide avenues for limited negotiated outcomes in certain contexts (cf. Baluarte, 2004).

⁸ Cf. *Saramaka People*, Interpretation Judgment, Para. 34, "In the context of restrictions of property rights in general, the Court has previously held that, in accordance with Article 21 of the Convention, a State may restrict the use and enjoyment of the right to property where the restrictions are: a) previously established by law; b) necessary; c) proportional, and d) with the aim of achieving a legitimate objective in a democratic society."

Tensions between the right to development and FPIC, or tensions between "liberal and communal logics," have increased in many parts of contemporary Latin America (Escobar, 2010: 4). The compelling interest test is legally uncontroversial, but puts communal societies at a disadvantage in the neoliberal era. Neoliberalization has been known to appropriate and transform nature and society at state and transnational scales, and neoliberal-era investments in Latin America have regularly been in the mega or giga range (Renfrew, 2011). China plans to continue this trend as it gains foothold in the region (see Dollar, 2017). It may become easier for states to assert a compelling interest in this investment climate. Projects such as the Grand Canal originate in the government's expressed interest to lift an entire country out of poverty (cf. Baluarte, 2004). Despite FPIC's inherent challenges, Sandinistas have returned to power in Nicaragua, nominally committing to Law 445 implementation improvements (Alvarado, 2007; Gonzáles, 2016). This and other progressive reforms have put Nicaragua at a "post-neoliberal" crossroads (cf. Escobar 2010). Its program is *Danielismo*.

Neoliberalization at Rest?

Recession in 1998 eroded support for rightist incumbents and contributed to a leftist resurgence in Latin America (Levitsky & Roberts, 2013). The Left did not have programmatic carte blanche, however. Many in the region supported neoliberal free trade and foreign investment policies (Levitsky & Roberts, 2013). Defining the leftist program in this political climate proves difficult. A spectrum of new Latin American "lefts" parts with older, stereotypical Marxist politics (Castañeda & Morales, 2007; Escobar, 2010). Latin America is at a conjuncture in which, "critical theories arising from many trajectories (from Marxist

political economy and post-structuralism to ‘decolonial thought’), a multiplicity of histories and futures, and very diverse cultural and political projects all find a convergence space” (Escobar, 2010: 3). Leftist moderation has paid off in this political climate (Castañeda & Morales, 2007: 204).

Nicaragua finds itself at a similar crossroads. In 2006, Daniel Ortega won the presidential election on the Sandinista platform, and Nicaragua came into league with ten other Latin American countries that had shifted left by January 2007 (Castañeda & Morales, 2007). The Sandinista resurgence was a fiction relative to its party counterparts in the ten other countries. The Sandinista voter share decreased between 2001 and 2006 (Kampwirth, 2008; Castañeda & Morales, 2007). Ortega’s true victory was to fragment the conservative political base and change election laws to ensure a numerical victory as an opposition leader (Kampwirth, 2008; Gonzáles, 2016). Over time, he distanced himself from his revolutionary bonafides as leader of the Nicaraguan Revolution and transformed the Sandinista party into a populist machine based on his cult of personality and ideological caprices (Levitsky & Roberts, 2013; Castañeda & Morales, 2007; Martí i Puig, 2010). For some, he had turned his back on the Revolution entirely (Bendaña, 2009).

A hybrid leftist program known as “Danielismo” emerged after 2007 that represented “a roundabout turn in the sphere of social policy, but ... a total continuity with the macroeconomic policies of previous [conservative] administrations” (Martí i Puig, 2010, pp. 93, 94). Ortega plans to surpass all Central American countries in foreign investment as a share of GDP, —a “courageous” effort to maintain macroeconomic stability, per the IMF chief—but the country’s flagging port, water, and electrical infrastructure hinder

these plans (The Economist, 2011). The Grand Canal and subprojects plan to improve Nicaraguan roads, deep-water ports, airports, and free trade zones, among others (Serrano, 2015).

This renewed focus on macroeconomic development competes with the commitment to follow through on protecting Atlantic Coast indigenous and afro-descendent peoples and their lands in the way the law sets forth. The Sandinista party and the MISUR-ASATA successor organization YATAMA entered an “Agreement of Alliance” in 2006 that outlined their joint strategy for governing the autonomous regions, including a commitment to reinstating the titling and land demarcation process under Law 445 (Gonzalez, 2016). This kick-started communal titling on the Atlantic Coast, but the government has not followed through on the *saneamiento* (title clearance; lit., ‘sanitization’) phase of the communal titling processes (González, 2016). The Grand Canal project further signals the new administration’s ambivalent relationship with communal property rights.

The Grand Canal megaproject is part in parcel of a larger strategy to deepen the neoliberal macroeconomic policies of prior administrations. By itself, it is a neoliberal project *par excellence*. Prominent scholars such as Harvey (2007) associate neoliberalization with eroded state sovereignty. The Master Concession and Implementation Agreement⁹ includes investment protection “stabilization” clauses enforceable under international arbitration that give HKND a “remarkable magnitude” of power over Nicaragua (Kjulin, 2015: 26). These clauses protect against “Political Force Majeure Events” that go beyond the usual acts of war and public disorder to include actions or inactions—presumably even fa-

⁹ Accessed 06/08/2017: [http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/SI-LEG/Gacetas.nsf/5eea6480fc3d3d90062576e300504635/fiecd8f640b8e6ceo6257b8foo5bae22/\\$FILE/Ley%20No.%20840.%20Contrato%20en%20ingl%C3%A9s.pdf](http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/SI-LEG/Gacetas.nsf/5eea6480fc3d3d90062576e300504635/fiecd8f640b8e6ceo6257b8foo5bae22/$FILE/Ley%20No.%20840.%20Contrato%20en%20ingl%C3%A9s.pdf)

cially-neutral ones—that “prohibit, delay, or otherwise restrict any investor or project affiliate” (p. 27). If the government disrupts the project through such regulatory takings, it must indemnify HKND (Kjulin, 2015). Regulation and legislation within or with effects on the concession are highly circumscribed until state ownership sufficiently matures,¹⁰ effectively creating a non-state space within Nicaragua’s sovereign borders.

HKND and the government have nonetheless committed to compensating Ramas and Kriols in perpetuity for use of Rama-Kriol communal lands in the Canal Impact Zone, albeit without much detail on land valuation and other aspects of implementation.¹¹ Respondents on Rama Cay express a mix of hope and uncertainty. For some, particularly key decision makers, compensation for HKND’s use of the land performs both a vital economic and communal governance function—monetizing the land while ridding it of *mes-tizo* colonizers.

Multiculturalism Remembered

Democratization during the Revolution created new spaces for participation (see Booth & Richards, 2006) that gave non-assimilationist indigenous ideologies room to breathe. Neoliberal reforms in the 1990s deepened economic woes, while also providing spaces for indigenous recognition and autonomy (Yashar, in Hale, 2004: 17). These institutional factors contributed to the second multicultural wave, which culminated in *Awastingni* and Law 445, a territorial turn (Bryan, 2012). Nicaragua’s leftward shift in 2006

¹⁰ Per the Master Concession and Implementation Agreement, Nicaragua’s stake in the Grand Canal megaproject begins at 1% and increases by 1% per annum. Nicaragua will not have a majority stake until 51 years after the specified commencement period.

¹¹ La Gaceta Diario Oficial. May 9, 2016. Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo del Gran Canal de Nicaragua y Gobierno Territorial Rama y Kriol. Convenio de Consentimiento Previo, Libre, e Informado para la Implementación del Proyecto de Desarrollo del Gran Canal Interoceánico de Nicaragua, 3710-3712.

deepened the government's commitment to Law 445. At every moment, neoliberalization, multiculturalism, and the new *Danielismo* have grown and transformed in a "convergence space," or historical conjuncture (Escobar, 2010: 3; see Grossberg, 2006).

While neoliberalization appears to work against the multicultural rights agenda on the Atlantic Coast, this is only in practice and not as an ideology. High rates of migrancy and plans for megadevelopment frustrate the enjoyment of communal property rights, and *saneamiento* is all but politically and administratively infeasible. Multicultural rights and indigenous identities do not disappear in these circumstances, but transform. They come to operate in the limited spaces neoliberal thought and practice afford—the "tribal slot" of the *indio permitido* (permitted Indian) (Li, 2000: 3; Hale, 2004: 17).

Neoliberal policies in Latin America "carefully delimit" multicultural rights to resemble radical goals, but only provide, "painstaking, technical, administrative, and highly inequitable" spaces for negotiation that enlist radical indigenous politics to the neoliberal project (Hale, 2005: 13). Scholars discuss similar processes of "domestication" (Hale, 2005: 20) in neoliberalism's transformation of identity (Laurie & Bonnet, 2002), shaping of citizens into consumers (Sorrels, 2009), and imposition of green developmentalism (e.g., McAfee, 1999; Bakker, 2010; McCarthy & Prudham, 2004). In the latter case, neoliberal thought and practice have supplied "specifically neoliberal measures" to preserve the natural environment by bringing it more fully into the realm of capitalist accumulation, supplying, "environmental fixes," such as marketization and privatization, to the internal contradictions of capital (Castree, 2008: 146).

Communal property rights partly originate in efforts to gain commercial advantage over the physical environment, through what Hale (2004: 17) terms the "cultural project," by making traditional land claims cognizable in formal law and answerable to capitalism

(cf. Wainwright and Bryan, 2009). This has facilitated extractives development in indigenous territories, bringing capitalist relations to indigenous frontiers (Hale, 2002, 2006; Wainwright & Bryan 2009: 155). The upshot in Rama-Kriol territory is that Ramas, Kriols, *mestizo* colonists, and land developers duel over space, weaving together a tapestry of semi-permeable indigenous and settler enclaves (see Chapter III). Livelihoods in the Rama community have begun to show signs of transformation (see Chapter IV). Left with few political or administrative opportunities to slow or control land-use change, Rama leadership seize on the Grand Canal and its limited spaces of recognition to reassert power over their domain. In so doing, they enlist themselves to a neoliberal cause, even as they enlist the cause to their own ends.

The Convergence of the Twain

IX

Alien they seemed to be;

No mortal eye could see

The intimate welding of their later history,

X

Or sign they were bent

By paths coincident

On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years

Said "Now!" And each one hears,

And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

—Hardy, *The Convergence of the Twain (Lines on the Loss of the Titanic)*, 1915

Limited spaces of recognition “limit and pre-figure” radical indigenous politics to market and state logics (Li, 2000: 4; Hale, 2005). Neoliberalism is not a monolith, however, nor hegemonic, nor pure imposition—it becomes constituted through interactions with its surroundings (Bakker, 2010; Castree, 2010; Clifford, 2004). Indigeneity is similar. It lacks a singular essence, *telos*, and is a “positioning” that emerges through the articulation of a set of “historically sedimented practices, landscapes and repertoires of meaning” (Li, 2000: 1). Indigeneity is an identity, a relational phenomenon that, like culture (Rogers, 2006), becomes constituted through various acts of appropriation. It is constantly reimagined at the crossroads of history, culture, and power (cf. Hall, 1996) and has come to encompass a wide variety of aspirations and forms as it has gained global resolution (Tsing, 2007; Clifford, 2001).

The neoliberal embrace of multicultural rights and, conversely, the multicultural embrace of neoliberalization (see Kymlicka, 2013), in some contexts, have caused integration of multicultural spaces into “transnational capitalist circuits,” making multicultural rights “highly ambivalent” in practice (Anthias and Radcliffe, 2015: 4). Neoliberal thought and practice have been the jumping-off point for indigenous countermovements, internal social and identity transformations, and even improved multicultural citizenship (see Lucero, 2008; MacDonald & Muldoon, 2006; Hale, 2005; Kymlicka, 2013).

Case studies in Bolivia (Anthias & Radcliffe, 2015) and highland Ecuador (Bebbington, 1993: 274) are two compelling examples of communities succumbing to, embracing, or rejecting capitalist interventions as they, “construct their resource management strategies.” Per Kymlicka (2013: 99), we can see “social resilience at work as [indigenous] people

contest, contain, subvert, or appropriate neoliberal ideas and policies to protect the social bonds and identities they value.” Neoliberalism’s “triumph [is therefore] insecure” as “contradictory processes of decolonizing/neo-colonizing, contestation/cooptation exist in dialectical tension, and sometimes open struggle” throughout the world (Clifford 2004: 5). Indigeneity has become, “a ‘heady mix’ of contradictory juxtapositions,” including, “authenticity *and* invention, subsistence *and* wealth, traditional knowledge *and* new technologies, territory *and* diaspora” (Tsing 2007: 33).

Rama Cay inhabitants likewise find themselves caught between the romance of their past and the reality of impending (or ongoing) economic and cultural transformation. This complicates what it means to be Rama. Nevertheless, communal property rights have stepped into the breach to guarantee a collective future. Ramas’ inability to exercise meaningful control over their communal lands, however, has left them shy of their expectations, creating a crisis of legitimacy among territorial leadership. The Grand Canal represents an alternative strategy for territorial control, one that recommends the power and accountability of transnational capital over the state. The neoliberal cultural project becomes culture’s neoliberal project, so to speak, as brute dispossessionary force, loose conventions on corporate responsibility, and the conceit of protective rights frameworks transform megadevelopment into a tool of government and self-determination.

To Be Rama

Scholars such as Eric Wolf (1982) and Edwin Wilmsen (1986) have questioned the remoteness of the remotest societies. Indigenous peoples, even the iconic San of the Kalahari Desert (Wilmsen, 1986), are not, “as isolated from other populations as once as-

sumed” (Ludlow et al., 2016: 2). Cultures, even those that scholars once classified in allochronic terms, as primordial or primitive, are not artefacts (Rogers, 2006). They deconstruct, reconstruct, and articulate new domains of practice as they enter new fields of encounter (Clifford, 2004). The naturalness of this process does not engender ease for those undergoing it. Rama identity is the site of personal struggle. It is a liminal space and a constant, uncertain becoming. The dual movement of globalization and decolonization in Rama territory has promoted the fragmentation of Rama subjectivities and the coextensive natural world. As domains of Rama cultural practice begin to loosen, possibilities for new articulations with modernity arise. Ramas must re-locate what remains of their past within existing domains of power (cf. Li, 2000; Clifford, 2004).

Deconstructing Culture. Ramas believe they once lived in a state of autonomy, plenty, and freedom to engage in self-determined cultural practices. *Mr. Penrose*, by William Williams (1727-1791), for example, describes a landscape of prodigious abundance on the Atlantic Coast, plausibly in Rama areas (Loveland, 1975), some two hundred years ago:

The mangrove swamps, parasitic jungle figs, “cashoo” and cotton trees, wild limes, prickly pears, candlefruit, the “alloe” or century plant all vivify the landscape. Biological forms attract fuller description, from the reptilian “Guano’s” (iguanas) and a vast variety of snakes, “centipeeds,” and scorpions, to wild tapirs and “warees,” *tigres* or “Wood cats,” anteaters, turtles—a moonlight frolic on the beach is a charming scene as they ride the huge carapace of a sea-turtle into the surf—together with “barrow-cooters” or barracudas, rasp- and sting-rays, land crabs, flamingoes, iridescent tropical butterflies, and a hundred other creatures (Wadsworth et al., 2013).

Scenes of natural abundance exist in the living memory. A middle-aged man recalls the following:

This time is not like the first time, when my parents and grandfather used to live. In those time, you used to get plenty things. We have plenty shrimps, plenty fish, plenty *manty* [manatee], plenty deer, plenty *wary*

[boar]. ... Well, we used to have everything free, as I say. We can go hunt, we can go fish, we can go anywhere, any hour, any time.

Economic and land-use changes stemming from colonial and national policy have progressively fragmented Rama spaces and transformed Rama identity over time. Growing land and resource scarcity and progressive integration into broader social and economic spheres fuel anxiety among interviewees that Ramas are on the cusp of losing—or have lost—an essential claim to being Rama. Some believe the archetypal “Rama” is already gone: Today’s Rama has miscegenated bloodlines (typically *mestizo*), does not speak the Chibchan Rama language, enjoys a non-Rama diet, sports a non-Rama appearance, has become more individualistic, is beginning to refuse traditional cultural or livelihood practices—or actively engage in non-Rama ones—and is losing interest in the Moravian religion as s/he becomes more hispanicized. These changes, relentless, are the source of personal struggle for many. A 35-year-old man with a young family recounted changes in his own life using his house, which we sat in, as an example:

We have a lot of change. I [am] 35 years [old]. When I have 5 or 10 years, we never see this kind of houses. We never use zinc, we use leaf. And we use *piso* [floor] not like this. We have ground, dirt. That’s the real culture house we had before. We used to build them before with sticks. Different kind of sticks. On the *tierra* [ground]. As usual, we don’t have a lot of things in our house: nor TV, nor phones, nothing. We cook on wood. That’s our culture. By this time, now, we have a different house. We have light, but we have candles before. We [used to] walk in our house without shoes. There are plenty custom we have. We used to get our hair long, in that time. Everything changing.

Reconstructing Culture. Some interviewees have managed to take cultural change in stride. One younger man said, “I think some [cultural change] good, some bad for me. The good one for me is, we have technology. Some things, you have to change it, I see like.” Another said, “Sure [Rama culture] changed a little. But we have that [identity] in our blood, in our heart. So, I don’t think that change.” Communal

land rights provide, in the very least, the sense that Ramas will persist as a people cum legal subject. A platform, however narrow, from which to pursue a collective future. But even if what it means to be Rama nominally exists in those media—the heart and the law—the key to the future is rooted in the material enjoyment of territory. As MISURASATA leader Brooklyn Rivera (1983) once proclaimed, “An Indian without land is not an Indian!” Territory is a sacred cultural bond. The map upon which Rama cultural practices unfold, and a precipice from which to “look backward moving forward,” by engaging a “generative socio-mythic tradition” (Clifford, 2004: 7) inscribed in the soil and water.

Re-locating Culture. Ramas’ marked territorial disposition is a fairly new development. Older interviewees recall a territory more nebulous. Customary uses, which are fluid, developed in this landscape: “Rama used to go up and down [the territory], according to our culture. We do not stay, we run from place to place. We planting [hunting, foraging, and fishing] there, we come back.” Elders passed down territorial boundaries through an oral tradition. “They [elders] used to tell us about the ancestors’ territory, of our Indian land. We don’t have document,” said one older man. Boundary-making, he said, involved the use of natural features as mnemonics, whereby, “If you go from this point, you see this point, this big point. From there, to the next point, is for Rama.” *Awastingni* and Law 445 fixed this fluid landscape onto a map, placing boundary markers (*mojones*) at its borders.

Territorial and land-use fluidity have historically justified dispossession of Atlantic Coast inhabitants. Per Offen (2003: 386), “the trope of *caza y pesca*,” or fishing and hunting, delegitimized Indians and Creoles as, “rootless wanderers,” lacking, “meaningful and

legitimate attachments to the land.” Those arguments indeed animated the state’s counterclaims in *Awas Tingni* (Hale, 2005). Civil society sought to remedy this problem, a common one for indigenous peoples, by advancing a territorial vision of indigenous rights based on modern cartography and property law (Wainwright & Bryan, 2009). When Nicaragua adopted Law 445 under compulsion of *Awas Tingni* and multi-lateral donors (Alvarado, 2007), it offered demarcation and titling as the ultimate form of recognition. Ramas stepped into this space, as did many others. Their pursuit of culture articulated with the pursuit of property rights.

Canaleamiento. To give a natural or juridical person a property in something is to give them an enforceable claim (Larson & Soto, 2008). Scholarship has shown that land titles have done little for poor people, even making them less secure (Ho & Spoor, 2005; Bromley, 2008). Titles without the “full backing of the state are meaningless” (Larson & Soto, 2008: 4; cf. Ostrom, 2015), except in cases where users draw from other sources of legitimacy (see Broegaard, 2005; Larson & Soto, 2008). Rama communal title lacks state backing. Central and regional authorities have failed in their duty to assist with the resolution of overlapping or abutting colonist claims under *saneamiento* procedures, a common problem for Law 445 titling and demarcation processes (Gonzalez, 2016).

This has left a lacuna where state power of enforcement should be. The Rama-Kriol Territorial Government (GTR-K) continues to pursue a *saneamiento* framework of coexistence with land colonists (Acosta, 2007), but have had to proceed on their own. Leaders refer to this as *auto-saneamiento* (self-title-clearance), because it lacks the central government. *Auto-saneamiento* has largely failed (discussed more in Chapter IV). The

GTR-K lacks the necessary expertise, resources, and authority to negotiate the rapidly-proliferating land colonist settlements in the territory. They, quite simply, lack legitimacy.

Auto-saneamiento has left leaders searching for surrogate state power.

Enter the Canal. Land rights depend on a multiplicity of formal/informal sources of authority for legitimacy, which can encourage “forum shopping” for favorable outcomes in the event people seek judgment in a land dispute (cf. Toulmin, 2009; Broegaard, 2005). The broader project of communal land rights has been to reconfigure “a plethora of state agencies and other external actors” (Sletto, 2009: 253) who, in Nicaragua, have struggled so far to legitimate Rama communal title (cf. Gonzalez, 2016). The Canal offers an alternative forum in which to seek favorable resolution to an intractable dispute with land colonists.

The Canal will depopulate, generate revenues from, and essentially govern a space in Rama territory that land colonists have overrun, monopolized, and managed for themselves. This view is current, GTR-K policy dictum. Héctor Thomas, President of the GTR-K, is on record using this argument as a rationale for supporting the Grand Canal (Johnson, 2015). The argument has its detractors, but has purchase among Canal supporters, a view best summarized in the words of the following pro-Canal individuals:

All these areas is already destroyed. So, let the Canal pass. And you cannot go and tell them [*mestizos*] anything. So, that is a big problem. You cannot go and stop them, not even the law. ... It can be a good way so that the Rama can use a strategies [*sic*] ... and make them go away. And use the land that is destroyed.

The Canal there gonna use 2-something per cent of our land in Punta Gorda. I was have it in my computer, but. [Drawing on paper]. ... Here is where the famous *Gran Canal* will pass. Here is one of the famous red zone. Here the Canal is going to pass. Here is only *colonos* [colonists]. The red zone is only *colonos*. No Rama exist here. You will never find one Rama in this zone. Because this zone, where the Canal going to pass here, is already destroyed. You have colonos that have 2, 300 manzanas [500-750 acres] in

cows. ... We not going to lose our land if we already lose it. What they [Canal] gonna destroy, if they already destroy? Comparing to these colonos in our territory, in 20 years, maybe [they] destroy more than the Canal in 50 years.

They furthermore assume that such an outcome will benefit them, as Ramas, because

Ramas have special rights as indigenous peoples, and so can hold HKND to account:

The Rama could sit down and delegate with the enterprise [HKND] and the government and make some kind of treaty that says, “You will use this part of my land. What is my part, what is my interest? Because you cannot just use my land.” That would be one way to get rid of these people. ... We need to sit down and [negotiate]. I need to go make a panga, I need a machine to run the panga, I need to change the house to a better building, I need to have college, I need a lot of things.

For us, as Rama, I think you have some benefits maybe. Because, we have a law [Law 445] of managing the way we want to manage. In that law, also, we have the reforestation. Have to reforest [the land] back. Have lots of, say—It will create jobs. Maybe not. Most thing, they have to *reforestar* [re-forest the land]. Why these *colonos* people them against it? Because they would have to move. And I think that is the most positive benefit, I would say, in our territory. They would have to move. And we would have to *reforestar*.

The Grand Canal becomes a tool for territorial control—evicting non-Ramas, producing revenues, and even reforesting the landscape (required to restore the watersheds to make the Grand Canal feasible from an engineering standpoint, see Condit, 2017). History, particularly *Awás Tingni*, has taught Rama and other Atlantic Coast peoples that, even in the absence of strong state-backing and enforcement, there is hope of holding the state and highly-visible agents responsible for their activities on indigenous lands.

Entre Ríos

I have attempted to provide a broad historical overview of the development of identity politics, multicultural rights, neoliberal policymaking, and the merger of neoliberal and multicultural ideologies in Rama pro-Grand Canal rhetoric and subject positions.

This reveals insufficient state-backing and enforcement of Rama-Kriol title in a broader spatial plan of capitalist accumulation. This has left Rama decision makers searching for ways to revive the communal property regime. The limited political and market powers property rights afford Ramas suggest the power and accountability of transnational capital over the state. The Grand Canal becomes a way to assert control over the territory, where the state has failed. I have argued that this an example of both neoliberalization's domesticating power, and the agency indigenous peoples bring to bear to strengthen multicultural citizenship through neoliberal economic projects. It is unclear who is using whom.

It may be easier to imagine holding a large multinational corporation to account over a highly dispersed, disorganized group of emigrants. When I asked the Grand Canal opposition movement what they made of land colonists in Rama-Kriol territory, none saw them as allies, even though they are the hardest-hit by a hypothetical canal, numerically. The overwhelming majority of land colonists do not have enforceable land rights. Both Grand Canal supporters and oppositionists profess to *loath* land colonists. The land colonist invites Grand Canal supporters to view the Canal as a territorial strategy. The Grand Canal opposition, on the other hand, misses an opportunity to build a broad-based coalition in the territory. In the next chapter, I discuss the Rama land contest with land colonists, with attention to the limits on cooperation going forward.

CHAPTER IV. BY BLOOD AND SOIL: A GEOGRAPHY OF TRUST ON THE RAMA FRONTIER

“The Lagoon Belong to We”

“He gon’ get vexed!” Eddie¹² shouted.

Five minutes before, he was dead-drunk in the shadow of the thwart, spitting rain-water from his chattering gold teeth and cackling weirdly. I was shivering at the bow as lightning made a bluish room all around us. Bluefields was glinting fore to aft. The panga was twisting in the frothy current. The outboard motor was tangled in a fisherman’s net.

“Knife! Knife!” Eddie yelled. Nobody had a knife.

It was all Eddie’s fault. We left after dark because he was on booze holiday in Bluefields. Now he was berating his son Marty. I took pity on Marty. I shone my light on the outboard motor where Marty was tugging the net, cursing. The fisherman who owned the net spotted us and tottered over the waves.

“The light!” Eddie hissed.

The fisherman’s spotlight was a pale moon. He drifted in sideways. Marty rafted up the jostling pangas with a line. Eddie just stood hunched with his foot on the gunwale, not making much noise. Everyone seemed unsure.

The fisherman was an old *mestizo* man with big leathery hands and a ball cap pinched at the brim. I couldn’t see his face too well, but he had a big aquiline nose. His

¹² Real names and potential identifying information have been altered.

hands were folded over a machete on his lap. He spoke Spanish. He asked us what happened. Eddie told him his son had run over the net. The fisherman just nodded and looked up at us awhile, saying nothing.

Eddie nudged me, "Money!"

I pulled out some crumpled bills. He gave the fisherman half. The fisherman tipped his hat and pushed away into the storm.

We got the engine started and made for Rama Cay. By the time we arrived, the sack of rice I'd brought was soaked. I lugged it over mud and broken oyster shells, trying like hell not to lacerate my feet. I arrived at the family's wooden house. The interior was dark, except for a single candle.

I said hello to Eddie's brother Geronimo and told him what had happened. The women shook their heads when they saw the rice. They threw it right into a pot.

"No good what happened, that," said Geronimo. "No good to pay the *mestizo* them."

I asked why.

"The lagoon belong to we," he said. "The Rama."

#

Who *does* the lagoon belong to? Ramas and Kriols have communal title to an area nearly twice the size of Delaware. It could be that the *mestizo* gentleman had no claim to fishing there. But, for my part, the legal question is less interesting. No law enforcement was present. This is true of many such situations: The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is a weakly governed space (Hale, 2011). The encounter stands for something more fundamen-

tal and pervasive; namely, interviewees' lack of trust for land colonists, or those who illegally enter and use the lands and resources over which Ramas and Kriols have an enforceable claim.

It may seem obvious: No one trusts a "thief." The picture is much more complicated, however. The likelihood of removing land colonists from Rama-Kriol territory is slim, verging on impossible (politically, logistically). Land colonists far outnumber Ramas and Kriols. Social and economic integration among Ramas, Kriols, and land colonists is a reality. The Rama-Kriol Territorial Government (GTR-K) has accordingly embraced a policy of *convivencia* (coexistence) with land colonists, a program of non-eviction that seeks a degree of natural resource co-management (see Acosta, 2010). If the GTR-K hopes to rationally preserve Rama-Kriol lands, natural resources, and effective rights of ownership, cooperation with land colonists is key.

This chapter therefore asks: Why do Ramas lack trust for land colonists, and what are the limits on cooperation going forward? This question has both practical and theoretical application. In the absence of robust enforcement mechanisms, a lack of trust means that there is a lack of minimal social underwriting for existing rules and regulations. Ramas miss out on a potentially useful way to exert territorial control. Indeed, as I discuss below (and at more length in Chapter IV), interviewees perceive natural resource degradation and land scarcity to be major, growing, and unmanageable problems. Theoretically, this question reveals the dynamics of trust in real-world contexts. Trust unfolds in both time and space in Rama-Kriol territory. Experimental social dilemmas in the commons literature typically address time, but only on limited horizons.

Ostrom's (2003) behavioral theory of social dilemmas, my framework of analysis, is one example. Lab experiments show that initial trust and face-to-face communication

generate and sustain cycles of trust, reciprocity, and reputation, which become cooperative relationships and social capital over time. Initial trust stems from what Ostrom calls “prior training” (2003: 49), or the learned heuristics, norms, and rules boundedly-rational individuals bring to bear when deciding whether to place trust in others. The conflict between Ramas and land colonists is historically situated. I extend Ostrom’s “prior training” to epistemic-normative heuristics arising from historical processes of *othering*. In short, stereotypes of the “disreputable *mestizo*” and “ineffectual Indian” menace, informing low generalized trust for land colonists.

Trust is also geographically situated. Ostrom and Walker (1991) discusses how costs of communication in the real world can limit face-to-face communication (thus relationship-building, enforcement, etc.), alluding to a spatial dimension. In the complex social landscape of Rama-Kriol territory, I find that locational and social distances have interactive effects that create certain possibilities for communication and trust-building in different areas. This dynamic situation exceeds “costs of communication,” narrowly defined. What emerges is a “geography of trust” consisting of basic area restrictions—red, yellow, and green zones—that speak to the fragmentation of Rama livelihoods and spaces over time. These prefigure emerging Grand Canal territorialism and clientelist politics, which I discuss in Chapters III and V. For now, I discuss *trust*.

In what follows, I provide a history of nation-building, othering, land contests, and land reforms on the Atlantic Coast. I subsequently discuss official failures to clarify Rama-Kriol ownership to outsiders. I then discuss generalized trust for land colonists *as mestizos*, detailing how stereotypes rooted in historical othering and opposed subject-positions contribute to the perception of an unbridgeable cultural divide, militating against baseline

trust. I finally discuss trust as a geographically dynamic relationship, manifesting as uneven trust for land colonists in practice.

Chronology: Contours of Conflict

A history of confrontation between *mestizo* (Indo-Hispanic) and *costeño* (Atlantic Coast) peoples frames interviewees' low level of trust for land colonists. This confrontation is rooted in a history of divided colonial rule. The Spanish settled the Pacific Coast of present-day Nicaragua and were unable to successfully colonize the Atlantic Coast. The Miskito Kingdom allied with the British to resist Spain's attempts (Hooker, 2005). By the mid-19th Century, the US had begun to replace the English as a regional hegemon, gradually bringing the Atlantic Coast into its cultural and economic sphere (Sollis, 1989). Black and Indian populations on the Coast enjoyed relative autonomy under British and US rule (Hooker, 2005).

Autonomy ended when then-independent Nicaragua annexed the Atlantic Coast in 1894. The British relinquished formal control in 1905 under the terms of the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty (Hale, 1994). Racist theories of state-building guided this annexation, including, "the idea of Nicaragua as a 'civilized' nation trying to incorporate 'savage' blacks and Indians" (Hooker, 2005: 18). This later developed into ideologies of *mestizaje* in the early 20th Century. *Mestizaje* was a nationalist ideology that sought to reclassify an ethnically diverse population as *mestizo* (Indo-Hispanic) and thus as "Nicaraguan" (Hooker, 2005; Gould, 1998). *Mestizaje* came from confrontation with racist North American and European ideologies, which believed miscegenation produced inferior bloodlines. The imagery and texts of *mestizaje* valorized *mestizo* Indian origins, but incongruously left Black

and Indian *costeños* out (Hooker, 2005). *Costeño* Blacks and Indians soon found themselves at the bottom of a new racial hierarchy (Sollis, 1989; Offen, 2003).

Costeños became second-class citizens, but their regional and local identities persisted. Broad cultural and historic differences between Pacific and Atlantic populations remained. The Spanish language of the Pacific/highland regions and the indigenous languages and English of the Atlantic Coast audibly preserve these differences in the present day. Throughout the early 20th Century, *costeños* continued to identify with the English-speaking world for historical, cultural, and economic reasons (Hooker, 2005). US exploitation of rubber, bananas, lumber, and precious minerals brought *costeños* into the North American economic and cultural sphere. The US economic “Golden Years” on the Coast, the height of this connection in the first two decades of the 20th Century, would end with the Great Depression (Sollis, 1989).

Mestizo migrants from Pacific and highland regions settled the Atlantic Coast as early as 1894 Reincorporation, but large migrations did not begin until after World War II. This marked the beginning of the *mestizo* central state’s growing presence on the Atlantic Coast. In the post-WWII era, large-scale Pacific and highland production of cotton, sugarcane, cattle, and coffee uprooted tens of thousands of smallholders, who migrated to the Atlantic Coast to open land and work in the mines (Sollis, 1989; Cuéllar & Kandel, 2007). New waves of migration began in the 1960s and continue to the present day. These have come on the heels of natural disasters; government-encouraged occupation of state lands; post-war land redistribution; neoliberal economic reforms; growth in the cattle industry, narcotics trade, and declining agriculture; and land speculation along planned development tracts (see Jones, 1985; Cuéllar & Kandel, 2007; Abu-Lughod, 2000; Enríquez, 2010;

Herlihy, 2016; Finley-Brooke & Offen, 2009). *Mestizos* now comprise 63% to 73% of the Atlantic Coast population (Jamieson, 1999; Brunneger, 2007).

Cycles of dispossession and migration brought *mestizos* and the central state more firmly into the Coast. *Mestizaje* underwrote this process of “territorial encompassment” (Hale, 2011: 190). Scholars, popular media, and government officials utilized images of *caza y pesca* (hunting and fishing) to portray *costeños* as lazy, itinerant, and their lands as *res nullius*¹³ (see Offen, 2003). By the 1960s, mass indigenous organizations formed up to manage the growing presence of the central state. MISURASATA (1979-1986), an offshoot of these earlier movements (see also Chapter IV), would undergo ethnogenesis after the Nicaraguan Revolution (1979) and make demands for exclusive afro-indigenous rights (see Meringer, 2010). This did not square with the revolutionary ideologies of the new Sandinista government, and so MISURASATA took up arms with the Contras in 1981 (Hooker, 2005).

The Contra War (1981–1990) led to Law 28 (1987) on regional autonomy, a political resolution to indigenous armed insurgency (Ortiz, 1987). The reformed 1987 Constitution also included provisions on protecting communal land rights for indigenous peoples, although no mechanism existed to demarcate and title them (Alvarado, 2007). The regional governments proved ineffective at defending afro-indigenous communal lands from exploitation during the neoliberalizing reforms of the 1990s, which brought timber exports and infrastructure development to the Atlantic Coast (see Arraiza 2015). Land redistribution to Contra War ex-combatants brought in thousands more land colonists (Abu-Lughod 2000).

¹³ *Res nullius* is a thing which has no owner. These arguments persist and indeed featured in Nicaragua’s defense of commercial activities on Mayangna lands in *Awas Tingni v. Nicaragua* (2001) (see Hale 2005).

Renewed tensions between *costeños* and the central state peaked over the commercial exploitation of lumber on Mayangna lands in the mid-1990s. This legal battle culminated in *Awes Tingni v. Nicaragua* (2001), a case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. *Awes Tingni* was a historic victory resulting in Law 445 (2002), which mandated the demarcation and titling of afro-indigenous communal lands on the Atlantic Coast. Ramas and Kriols subsequently obtained communal title to a 4,608 square-kilometer areal claim in 2009 under Law 445 (Acosta, 2010).

Despite these advances, Nicaragua's policy stance toward its East has remained ambivalent: To draw lines around difference, ring-fencing alterity within a broader spatial plan of capitalist exploitation. Finley-Brooke and Offen (2009) argue that this has led to the dual production of neoliberal and multicultural space on the Atlantic Coast. Competing conceptions of land use, including state cartography, nonindigenous private property regimes, and more fluid communal regimes exist in a convergence space (see Finley-Brooke & Offen, 2009; Stocks et al., 2007), one in which many afro-indigenous communities have enforceable claims under deed of title. Land conflict has developed over time (see Herlihy 2016). Rama-Kriol territorial officials, all the while, have struggled to exercise powers of exclusion as land colonists continue to stream in. I next turn my attention to these efforts.

Clarifying Ownership

Ramas and Kriols have struggled to exclude nonmembers from their common property. High rates of emigration and a lack of legitimate authority plague efforts to do so. Attempts to dictate land-colonist uses have produced vanishingly few agreements, proceeding under a semi-formal *saneamiento* (clearance) of title process. *Saneamiento* is the

final stage of communal titling after title has issued, in which local and national authorities resolve conflicting, nonmember claims to indigenous communal land. The GTR-K's official *saneamiento* framework (*The Guide for Coexistence in Rama-Kriol Territory*) is based on a policy of non-eviction, which does not, "involuntarily evict anyone if they agree to respect the property, norms of living, and peaceful coexistence of the Rama and Kriol and rationally preserve the resources of the territory" (Acosta, 2010: 17).

Despite its collaborative, non-exclusionary outlook, arguably unique on the Atlantic Coast (see e.g., Herlihy, 2016; Finley-Brooke & Offen, 2009), responsible national authorities have still not lent their support. CONADETI, the National Demarcation and Titling Commission, admits that, "it does not have the necessary materials, tools, equipment and means of mobilisation necessary to carry out the activities of the demarcation and titling process" (CONADETI 2009: 13, in Isa 2017). National budgetary outlays have been broadly insufficient for *saneamiento* processes (see González 2012). Likewise, key figure in GTR-K *saneamiento* tells me the GTR-K has had to go it alone. Local leaders refer to this process as *auto-saneamiento* (self-title-clearance). The GTR-K undertook a pilot version of *saneamiento* beginning in 2009 and ending in 2011 (*Plan Piloto de Saneamiento*) with the support of Oxfam IBIS. *Saneamiento* now faces serious resource constraints.

It may be difficult, even with a constant population of land colonists, to undertake *saneamiento* in this institutional environment. *Saneamiento* ordinarily involves (1) locating land colonists, (2) determining why they are there, (3) evaluating any existing documentation, (4) and describing their activities and ecological impact (Isa, 2017). In Rama-Kriol Territory, other steps include educating land colonists on Rama-Kriol communal rights and creating land-use agreements based on respect of property, norms, and coexistence (see Acosta, 2010, above). Squatters can obtain title if they agree not to sell the land,

only passing it down to heirs, barring the consent of the territorial government (interview with local attorney, 2016). The high rate of emigration, however, makes even high-functioning *saneamiento* potentially ineffective as a tool of title enforcement. As Dietz et al. (2003) point out, anything more than a moderate rate of change in resource-user populations poses difficulty to commons governance.

Rama Cay interviewees likewise report returning to their agricultural lands at the beginning of the season to find new, unfamiliar faces all around. Herlihy (2016) notes similarly high rates of migration in the Miskito north. She maintains that land colonists now, “occup[y] nearly half of the indigenous and Afro-descendant ancestral territories in the Caribbean.” The ineffectiveness of communal title enforcement and instability of the resource-user population have produced a *de facto* open access regime, which Ostrom (2007: 6) defines as those lacking, “effective rules defining property rights by default,” such that no one can exclude anyone from accessing the resource, creating the potential for overexploitation. Anecdotal evidence from Rama Cay, official data (GTR-K, 2007), and cartographic analyses (IBIS, 2012) indeed suggest that deforestation and overfishing are widespread in Rama-Kriol Territory.

Although biophysical causes may contribute, Landsat data from the Atlantic Coast suggests a correlation between land colonist settlements and higher levels of forest disturbance (Stocks et al., 2007). One elder relatedly told me, “[Colonists] really destroy the land ... cut down the jungle. [But] the Rama know which and which tree they could cut.” And, “The most the Rama them cut is 5 manzana. The Spaniard them cut like 20, 30, 50 *manzana*.” The same applies to overfishing. A fishing middleman was one of many interviewees to tell me about the widespread use of poison in Rama fisheries and waterways.

“The mestizo them all throw chemic [chemicals] for kill fish, kill shrimps. So everything disappear.”

These disturbances signal the importance of both reviving formal title enforcement measures and generating social capital among communal title members and existing nonmembers. Formal policy firstly recognizes the need for coexistence (*convivencia*) with land colonists. Even with the minimal backing of formal authorities, case studies demonstrate that resource users can cooperatively manage common-pool resources, such as the forests, fisheries, and pastures of Rama-Kriol territory (see GTR-K, 2007), through bonds of informal association based on trust (see Ostrom, 2003, 2007). I now turn my attention to trust.

The Disreputable Mestizo

Geronimo. I'd spend my nights in Geronimo's kitchen. He'd swing in his tarp hammock and pick his silver teeth. I'd sit at the greasy table, flicking bits of rice and fish that the well-water could not dislodge. Chickens sparred over this gruel. Geronimo said the kitchen was quarter for Sandinistas during the Contra War. His dad leaned Contra, but paid no mind. He was, he said, a Man of God. He did not discriminate among human needs because of politics. I wondered what had changed. Surely the two sides of the Contra War hated each other more than Ramas and land colonists. Maybe there were no land colonists to quarter, strictly speaking. Hell, some of the last ones to set foot on Rama Cay had been shot dead. Of course, they were up to no good. Geronimo explained that Ramas had tried to make amends with land colonists. Had tried to get them to accept certain terms of land use. All for naught, because relations remained in the gutter.

Interviewees believe land colonists will not act in Ramas' best interest, and so lack trust. They base this generalized assessment on land colonists' reputations as *mestizos*, a conventional form of other-regarding. I argue that this is an element of "prior training" under Ostrom's (2003) behavioral theory. Prior training consists of the heuristics, norms, and rules that individuals rely on to determine whether to initially trust others. Historical *othering* and stereotyping are core features of this assessment. To *other* is to juxtapose oneself and others to constitute the Self (see Jensen, 2011). Lister (2004: 101) describes this as a, "process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between 'us' and 'them'—between the more and the less powerful—and through which social distance is established and maintained." Nation-building likewise created a racial hierarchy that relegated Ramas and *mestizos* to inferior and superior subject positions, respectively (see Hooker, 2005).

Othering relies, in part, on symbolic degradation of the other through stereotyping (see Jensen, 2011). Stereotypes are epistemic-normative heuristics (see Schneider, 2004; Bodenhausen, 1990; Wagner et al., 2009) that produce guidelines for interaction, such as, "*mestizo*, therefore disreputable," and, "*mestizo*, therefore such-and-such an action is justified." This relies on *category essentialization*, which projects an, "unalterable ... ontological existence independent of human thought and action," onto categories of people (see Wagner et al., 2009: 367). *Mestizos* thus become *inherently* disreputable in certain ways. Stereotyping becomes evident both in the signifiers Rama interviewees use to describe land colonists, and the decontextualized characteristics Ramas ascribe to them, often in juxtaposition to the archetypal Rama.

Confronting the Other

Interviewees refer to land colonists using signifiers that emphasize racial, historical, cultural, and linguistic difference. They most often use the signifier *mestizo* to describe land colonists, a racial term identifying land colonists as Indo-Hispanic and, importantly, non-*costeño*. In second order, they refer to land colonists as *Spaniards* and *the Nation*. *Spaniard* recalls land colonists' colonial attachments to the Spanish language and to Spain, in contrast to *costeños*, who have historical affinity for the English and North Americans. *The Nation* equates land colonists to the *mestizo* central state, whose object has been to create a *mestizo* nation exclusive of Black and Indian *costeños* (see Hooker, 2005 and above).

Interviewees also refer to land colonists using legal or semi-legal terms. *Tercero*, for example (lit., “third party”), is a legal term that denotes a natural or juridical person who declares a property right in indigenous territory, but does not belong to that community (GTR-K 2007; Acosta 2010). *Colono* is like *tercero* and means “colonist” or “settler.” *Ex-combatiente* refers to land colonists who received title to land on the Atlantic Coast as pacification after the Contra War (see Abu-Lughod, 2000). *Viejo viviente* (lit., “old liver”) refers to longer-term land colonists, who have lived in Rama-Kriol territory for potentially many generations.

These signifiers *stand* for something. They encode information about the individuals to whom they apply. Firstly, they fall into temporal categories distinguishing “good” from “bad” land colonists. *Viejos vivientes* and sometimes *ex-combatientes* refer to land colonists who have been in the territory for a long time. Interviewees perceive them as friendly, trustworthy, conservative users of land. Ramas often have personal relationships

with them. One middle-aged man said, “Some of them old Spaniards that live a long time ... they have a right to stay there. Some of them have almost 50 years. We have a close relation with *viejos vivientes*.” Another said, “Some of them, some of them have Indian girl. So, them make a relation, more or less. They have Indian girl and they get a pickniney [child]. Friends [like] that we have.”

The remaining terms—*mestizo*, *colono*, *tercero*, *Spaniard*, *the Nation*—apply to *viejos vivientes* and *ex-combatientes* in the strict sense. They apply more readily, however, to shorter-term land colonists. Interviewees perceive short-term land colonists as unfamiliar, unfriendly, and violent in the extreme; as non-reciprocators who heavily discount the future and fail to respect the land or Ramas’ rights to it. Interviewees perceive them as doing violence to essential Rama character traits, including temperance, docility, and a desire to maintain balance with the natural world. One interviewee, a younger man, told me, “The new one they have like five, seven, ten years ... They want to kill you. These kind of people we don’t talk to.” Another, woman, said, “You know how the Spaniard get style, yeah? Spaniard them, if you touch them hand, them take you whole hand.”

On the flipside of *mestizo* stereotypes—violence, rapacity, etc.—Ramas view themselves as unable to engage with the contemporary world (to which the *mestizo* belongs) on its aggressive, competitive, expansionist terms. Ramas are, in the words of interviewees, docile, lacking the courage to enforce claims against outsiders, and inferior (e.g., destined to poverty). This mirrors *mestizaje* tropes about the passive and backward Indian (see Hooker, 2005; Offen, 2003):

Passivity

If we stand and demand, we have [our rights and territory]. But is not our way to demand.

We are weak and few. We don't have ability to manifest ourselves before the government. So, *mestizos* see that the government does not enforce [our land rights].

Backwardness

Rama people don't have capacitation.... Because what we work, and money that we make, is just something small.

I think God send we to [be] so... Poor, like. When you say Rama people, is like poor people. No have nothing what is good, what the rich them have.

Ramas and land colonists arrive at what interviewees perceive as a cultural impasse. An unbridgeable juxtaposition. A former president of the GTR-K referred to this as a state of "cultural contradiction." The following interviewee remarks, taken from multiple sources, illustrate this point:

Future Discounting versus Stewardship

For us, they make a big farming. Destroy the forest. Contaminating the river. Hunting all the wild animal. They want to invade everything and destroy.

We just not like them. We don't have a custom to make destruction. We satisfy to what we have. We work a small territory, what we could survive from. But they, they think about a big amount.

Greed versus Temperance

They just buy and sell. Rama just does not have that way of living. More land is more money for them.

Violence versus Docility

They have *armas* [weapons]. So you cannot go say this is our land, because they shoot you.

We are so tolerant. If we getting intolerant, we getting conflict.

Mutual Misunderstanding

You tell them, for example, that you could please don't make destruction to the land? And they take it like we want to take away their territory. But we just want to make a deal with them. They don't understand. They don't pay anything any mind.

The character traits interviewees attribute to the stereotypical land colonist may have the ring of truth: As *mestizos*, they belong to a political-economic worldview centered on individualism, private property, and profit maximization (see Stocks et al. 2007). These logics may unfold individually, creating the impression of unfriendliness or aloofness, rapaciousness, and violence. For example, land colonist settlements tend to be individual and not communal (Stocks et al., 2007), which may appear unfriendly or aloof to Ramas, who are communitarians. Land colonists also tend to use more land (Stocks, *ibid.*), which has clear associations with rapacity. Many also reportedly carry weapons to defend their land claims (see also Herlihy, 2016), which insecure or unenforceable claims may recommend, in some cases.

In contrast, Ramas live communally, use less land, and have fluid individual land claims. Ramas mostly managed to avoid the colonial project (Baldi, 2013), and subsequent cultural-economic projects that transformed Pacific Indians and laid the groundwork for *mestizo* posterity. The nationalist hierarchy of race also defined-down a *costeño* identity, an inferior “other” subject position, which Ramas and other *costeños* relegated themselves to and further set out to distinguish during the political organizing of the 1960s and 1970s, the ethnogenesis of the early 1980s and Contra War, and the cartographic-legal battles for indigenous land rights of the 1990s and 2000s. This alterity, albeit defiant, continues to live a life of inferiority—the “ineffectual Indian”—in juxtaposition to the “disreputable *mestizo*.”

This indigenous-colonist binary belies a messy reality, however. Ramas themselves are enmeshed in the money economy, and interviewees report that Ramas have increasingly adopted the livelihoods and cultural traits of dominant *mestizo* society (see Chapter IV). Zeledón (2004) similarly observes that there is no archetypal *mestizo* on the Atlantic

Coast. The myth of *mestizaje*, Zeledón argues, has not just erased Black and Indian identities, but unique *mestizo* identities on the Atlantic Coast. *Mestizos* exist on a cultural continuum with local populations. Propinquity, or spatial nearness, has bred homophily, or interconnection due to shared similarities. Rama interviewees likewise have varied relationships with land colonists *in space*, producing a metaphorical heat map of uneven, in-practice trust. I discuss this “geography of trust” in the next section.

A Geography of Trust

Many Rama Cay residents live beside land colonists when they occupy their seasonal agricultural residences. When they are not cultivating, they may live on Rama Cay for months at a time, a half-day or more away from agricultural lands by canoe (*dory*) or larger boat (*panga*). Land colonists have encircled Rama Cay agricultural lands on the mainland—Kukra River, Dokunu, Torsuani, and Western Hill. Major Rama settlements in the north of the territory, such as Bangkukuk and Sumu Kaat, are adjacent to or amid dense land colonist settlements. Ramas must therefore contend with variable *social* and *locational* distances as they conduct activities in their communal territory, such as cultivating, hunting, fishing, engaging in recreation (*paseando*), doing business, or traveling.

The average distance between Rama Cay and agricultural lands (a half day) prevents or hinders sustained face-to-face communication with land colonists, placing conceivable limits on monitoring and enforcement (cf. Ostrom & Walker, 1991). The length of absence from agricultural lands during fishing times compounds this problem. Locational distance may thus increase social distance. Likewise, negative patterns of interaction with land colonists contribute to negative reputational information; sheer unfamiliarity gives

space to conventional other-regarding. This social distance may increase locational distance, in the sense of enforcing mutual isolation. Ramas never enter certain areas, minimally enter others, and never interact with certain people. What emerges is a metaphorical heat map of trust, or “geography of trust.”

Locational Distance

White Knuckles. We white-knuckled it on 72 beautiful horses to Tiktik Kaanu. Three weeks prior, I was in a 12-horsepower panga that threatened to take on water. The pilot's wife was angry that he was drunk and so tried to throw our fuel overboard. She resorted to beating him with an umbrella. I prayed we wouldn't capsize. The 15-kilometer journey took 2 hours. This time was different, though. Time: in oversupply. The boat stood above the waterline like a coiled snake. Whitewater shot up in curtains. Admiring onlookers stood by the riverbanks. Some 15 or so flagged us down. They had decided to travel to Bluefields in that instant. Elders floated by in dories as we waited. We tossed them some nacatamales. Their oars sloshed. Our engine growled. Ancients meet moderns. The territory never seemed as small. Not so fast, said someone. Sumu Kaat and Bangkukuk are still a day or two away. Thanks for killing my vibe (cf. Lamar, 2012).

Rama-Kriol communal title grants ownership of a combined 4,608 square-kilometers of land and territorial sea to around 1,900 Ramas and Kriols (see Acosta 2010). Rama and Kriol settlements are low-density and spread over a vast land area. Spanish colonial authorities described equivalent settlement patterns as *parcialidades*, or groups of 40 to 300 individuals with an average 40 to 50 kilometers in between them (Baldi, 2013). Most Ramas live in the territory's north. A large majority live on the small island of Rama Cay (Jamieson, 1999; Coe, 2008; GTR-K 2007). The south and its settlements are impractical to

reach for many in the north. Northern Ramas only infrequently travel between villages to visit relatives or conduct commerce. Travel to seasonal agricultural residences near main-land waterways, fisheries, hunting, and foraging grounds is semi-routine.

Village agricultural lands are located near, or intersperse, mainland Rama and Kriol settlements, but Rama Cay residents must paddle a half-day or more to reach their village lands (see Mueller, 2001). Most Ramas are therefore at considerable distance from their cultivated lands. These distances would not be as daunting if infrastructure, telecommunications, and transportation were better. Electricity, internet, and telephone capabilities are limited. Communication among Ramas and friendly land colonists, who may be in different places at different times in the territory, is limited. Roads minimally exist on the southeast Atlantic Coast. Even where they do, closer to Bluefields and El Rama, they have little use in the rainy season.

Ramas almost exclusively travel by boat. This is neither quick nor reliable. Pangas (larger boats with motors) are typically underpowered. Smaller engines are cheaper and burn less fuel. Several current and former GTR-K leaders independently quoted \$500 USD for a single 55-gallon barrel of fuel. A slow boat (~12-horsepower) and a fast boat (~72-horsepower) can consume 150 USD and 500 USD to reach the middle-point of Rama-Kriol territory (Bangkukuk) from the north. This is cost-prohibitive for Ramas, who primarily engage in subsistence activities and have low cash flow. The remaining option is to paddle and sail by *dory*, or canoe. The *dory's* smaller payload, dependence on manpower, weather, and sea conditions limits its radius, although Ramas use these for long-distance travel. The 15km distance from Rama Cay to Bluefields across open lagoon is a half-day paddle or more, and the 25km up winding rivers to Sumu Kaat is a three-day paddle.

Regular communal boat service is nonexistent. Ramas must usually travel in friends' pangas. Panga travel between Rama Cay and Bluefields is semi-frequent, but the only on-demand travel is for serious medical emergencies. The timing and destination of pangas is sporadic. On the mainland, for example, the few with pangas have no need to travel with any frequency and may stay put for up to a month, in the words of a Bangkuk communal leader. *Dories* are more reliable than pangas because most families have easy access to them. This may change over time, however, as tree varieties suited to the construction of *dories* come under land colonist control or disappear. The *dory*-building craft is likewise on the decline.

Dories and pangas tend to be vulnerable to weather and sea conditions. Many Ramas mentioned the possibility of capsizing and drowning. I witnessed one elderly man capsize his *dory* upon his return from a three-day paddle when a freak storm moved onto the lagoon. He survived, but Ramas have drowned in lesser circumstances. One family's close relative, for example, disappeared after paddling to a nearby cay. Many other bits of anecdotal evidence tell a history of tragedy on rivers, the lagoon, and open sea. Ramas lack adequate safety equipment, including life vests, marine communication systems, or even adequate covering for their boats during heavy rains. Floods can likewise inundate streams with dangerous tree debris and man-eating crocodiles. Thieves are known to steal boats, outboard motors, and fishing equipment.

These factors place limits on the time and scope of travel and port, creating fewer possibilities for Ramas to encounter land colonists in the territory. Such encounters typically occur on common routes, but only sporadically, with long intervals in between. The monitoring and enforcement challenges of this become obvious when one considers the

high rate of land colonist emigration. Alongside locational distances are problems of familiarity, or social distance, which I discuss next.

Social Distance

I infer that locational distances contribute to social distances based on evidence I have discussed so far: limited mobility, semi-regular access to agricultural lands, and unfamiliarity with new land colonists at the start of the agricultural season. Rates of emigration may be a significant factor, as well. That social distance conversely enforces mutual isolation, or uneasy overlap, is easier to demonstrate, albeit at a granular level. Interviewees refuse to travel in some parts of the territory and feel limited in what they can do in others based on geographically-situated stereotypes of land colonists and the degree of state presence in each area.

Some used the term *zona roja* (red zone) to describe areas they refuse to enter altogether. The first who used the term described it as an official designation for narcotrafficking areas that are too dangerous for the state itself to enter. I could find no evidence to support this claim. However, Nicaraguan popular media uses the term to describe places lacking effective regulation, such as red-light districts, places traffic accidents commonly occur, and slated development tracts where land users cannot get agricultural credit (García, 2017; Lara, 2014). Elsewhere in Latin America, such as Colombia, the government designates conflictive zones as *zona roja*, where, “national and regional politicians and public officials are even afraid to visit” (Ramírez, 2005: 69). The latter definition is accurate to this case. In addition to red zones, interviewees speak of less-restricted areas, which I refer

to as yellow zones. I call Rama or friendly-colonist areas green zones. I assume all remaining areas are patchworks of these broad categories, although this a broad heuristic that does not account for the microterrain of interaction.

Red zones are where interviewees perceive maximum physical danger. They include the erstwhile Rama villages of Wiring Cay and Punta Gorda, where few or no Ramas remain [see fig 2]. Current residents of Wiring Cay are reportedly *mestizos*, Miskitos, and Afro-descendants, all of whom are supposed narcotraffickers. The residents of Wiring Cay have a fearsome reputation for violence against outsiders. Punta Gorda differs from Wiring Cay in that it is mainly *mestizo* cattle-ranchers and farmers. It is one of the largest land colonist settlements in Rama-Kriol territory, and its red zone status is a recent development. The GTR-K signed a convention on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent in 2016 (see also Chapter IV) that agreed to lease Punta Gorda and surrounding areas, including the Rama-Kriol village of Bangkukuk, to HKND in perpetuity. One Rama politician told me, “lots of *mestizos* threaten the Rama them in Punta Gorda,” because the land colonists there perceive the Convention as an attempted eviction.

Two kinds of social distance predominate in these cases: lack of common interest and interethnic tension. No interviewees professed to drug-trafficking—many were indeed small farmers, fishermen, and homemakers. Most Ramas would have no business in Wiring Cay. Interethnic tensions predominate in Punta Gorda. In yellow zones, by comparison, interethnic tensions are also a feature of interaction, but mainstream economic interests, military and police presence, and local networks of Ramas facilitate travel, recreation, and commerce. Noted yellow zones in the north are San Pancho and San Francisco. Interviewees experience relative security in these areas if they avoid contentious topics, like

land issues. Said one interviewee, “I go and I no have no problem. But the problem is when you tell them about land problem. [Then] they thinking something else. To harm you.”

Green zones are located along well-traveled routes and areas of continuous habitation or use, including agricultural lands, house-site villages, and the territories of familiar land colonists (e.g., *viejos vivientes*). Area restrictions at the edges of these zones may be in constant flux, given rates of emigration. Some interviewees relatedly report the use of boundary markers to harden these spaces. For example, two Rama Cay men who cultivate in the heavily-colonized Kukra River area report placing boundary markers (*mojones*) around their lands. A Bangkukuk community leader reports similar uses of boundaries there. Green zones feature minimal social distance between resource users. Interviewees conduct livelihood activities most freely in these areas, engage on relatively equal terms with friendly land colonists, and even hire them as agricultural labor, or go to work on their farms.

Cisma Territorial

I have attempted to provide a broad historical overview of land conflict on the Atlantic Coast and in Rama-Kriol territory, touching on nation-building, othering, and land reform to provide context for low, generalized interviewee trust for land colonists. Ramas draw from stereotypes rooted in historical othering as heuristics, or prior training, when deciding whether to cooperate with land colonists in the territory. This has implications for future land use decisions, because it normalizes the desire to dispossess and evict land colonists (see Chapter III). I geographically situated in-practice trust, revealing a metaphorical “heat map” of trust: Land colonists have certain reputations, in certain areas, due

to certain patterns of interaction and stereotypes. Basic area restrictions emerge from this, which levels of state presence mediate.

I further considered the relationship between locational and social distance, discussing the ways in which prior training can weigh on relationships in physical space, and how common interests can diminish social distance. The “geography of trust” reveals that mediating factors such as history, geography, infrastructure, and technology can create certain *possibilities* for interaction, relationship building, and social-capital development over time. The inability to move freely through the territory, strike up relationships, etc., places limits on Ramas’ ability to engage in livelihood activities and enjoy rights to communal property. The latter, as pointed out in Chapter III, contributes to the diffusion of neoliberal-multicultural ideologies among key decision makers in the community, capital’s advance in the territory, and ongoing dispossession.

In the next chapter, I discuss the deeper implications of the livelihood limitations that the geography of trust reveals. Resource deprivation, in part, produces a logic of clientelist exchange—the exchange of goods for political loyalty—which has effects on Grand Canal politics. Trust, which we discussed in this chapter, is a rare commodity in the Rama Cay community itself, particularly among clan elites. Clientelism has institutionalized clan hostilities rooted in the Contra War, which has in turn divided Rama Cay residents’ responses to the Grand Canal.

CHAPTER IV. PUEBLO CHICO, INFIERNO GRANDE: CLIENTELISM AND GRAND CANAL POLITICS ON RAMA CAY

I, against my brothers. I and my brothers against my cousins. I and my brothers and my cousins against the world.

—Bedouin Proverb

“Small town, big fire”

They say the old inhabitants created Rama Cay from two islands using mounds of oyster shells. Walkways used to be just bony mosaics of mud and shell. Shells are now festering pyramids all over the island. The government poured concrete paths. They then built brightly colored fiber houses all over the south. They left the north and its houses of wood and palm alone. Seawater inundation in the middle of the island—the legendary oyster path—has gotten worse. The busted-up concrete basketball court has almost become an island unto itself: the meeting place of soccer pick-ups, a splinter Evangelist congregation, and a few government sows. The government has begun a seawall, but the island is drifting in two again. Development projects have put strain on the community. Old hostilities rooted in the Contra War, disputes over project benefits, and other state resource distribution have made Rama Cay, as one interviewee said, “like the Spaniard them say—*pueblo chico, infierno grande*.”

#

An opposition movement against recent interoceanic Grand Canal plans has formed up in the Rama-Kriol community, but the community is divided. Media have focused on the Rama opposition—a David v. Goliath, Indian v. Megadevelopment epic (e.g.

Kilpatrick, 2015, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Leidel, 2015). But between forty and sixty per cent of the residents of Rama Cay, the most populous Rama community in the territory, support the recent GTR-K agreement to lease Rama-Kriol land to HKND in perpetuity. This is based on interviewee estimates, which may reflect their biases on the lease agreement. Interviewees nonetheless recognize, as observations suggest, that the Grand Canal issue is far from settled. It is no secret that single communities respond to large-scale land deals in varied ways. Some benefit, and others do not. This reveals very little about *why* some benefit and others do not. This chapter answers the questions: Why and how do Rama Cay interviewees react the way they do to the Grand Canal, and with what outcome?

At first glance, divided responses appear related to party affiliation. Liberals oppose the Grand Canal lease agreement, whereas Sandinistas are in favor. Liberals do not oppose the agreement based on party ideology, however, but based on a professed commitment to Ramas' rights as indigenous peoples. They believe the government did not follow through on its responsibility to ensure free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). Rama Cay Sandinistas profess a similar commitment to indigenous rights, but disagree on the merits of Liberals' claims. I propose that this divided response has a predominantly material basis. Sandinista loyalists have reaped the benefits of public housing, patronage jobs, and smaller handouts since the Sandinista victory in the 2013 territorial elections, whereas Liberals lost their political majority and ability to access resources.

I analyze this conflict in relation to the broader history of patronage politics on the Atlantic Coast. The Contra War divided the main political family on Rama Cay and produced intra-clan and island divisions within larger Sandinista and Liberal national party structures. These parties have traditionally relied on clientelist exchange to consolidate

power. Regional and territorial decentralization involved Rama Cay political elites in clientelist exchange as party brokers. Intra-clan conflict with roots in the Contra War thus became institutionalized through clientelism. At the present historical conjuncture, territorial politics have come to resemble a spoils system, or *societas leonina*, as Nicaragua increasingly becomes a one-party Sandinista state, and as Liberals concomitantly lose access to public resources and meaningful national party connections, which can normally provide private resource access out of power.

The Grand Canal emerges as a way for Liberal elites to reaffirm deeply-held indigenous ideologies, but also as a programmatic strategy to maintain their political network and wrest control back from their political rivals in a time of profound political disenfranchisement. Without access to public or private resources, programmatic political strategies are what remain. To not engage in these strategies further imperils future resource-securement, given the history of loyalist distribution on the island. This chapter ultimately provides a deeper understanding of how clientelism operates in resource-poor, post-conflict environments, considering the ways in which demand-side and supply-side poverty can weigh on the operation of clientelist political networks and divided responses to major land acquisitions. In what follows, I provide historical context for the emergence of clientelism on Rama Cay, its conduct, and its role in Grand Canal politics.

From Liberation to Intra-Clan Conflict

The Nicaraguan Revolution (1979-1990) had lasting effects on local politics and clientelism in the Rama community. The Revolution was a response to centuries of colonialism and tyranny in Nicaragua (Close, 1999). It destroyed the Somoza dictatorship, a patri-

monial regime with a politicized bureaucracy that laid the groundwork for present-day clientelism in Nicaragua (Gonzales-Ocantos et al., 2012; Marengo, 2004). The Sandinistas were a revolutionary socialist group that hoped to pave the way for democratic institutions and inclusion (Close, 1999). A grassroots political renaissance came in their wake, mobilizing citizens into unions, interest organizations, and neighborhood groups (Booth & Richard, 2006), creating a political environment unfavorable to clientelism and other forms of corruption (see Anderson and Dodd 2005, 2009).

Indigenous organizations on the Atlantic Coast joined this grassroots political revival. The major revolutionary-era mass indigenous organization, MISURASATA¹⁴ (1979-1986), believed in a principle of democratic inclusion that produced conflict with the Sandinista government, however. They believed collective rights were the key to Indian inclusion, believing *mestizaje*, the nation-building project that sought to designate all Nicaraguans as *mestizos* (Indo-Hispanic), to be destructive of culture. They thus linked up with transnational indigenous advocacy circuits and adopted a pluricultural rights agenda (Van Cott, 2001; Meringer, 2010). The role of the state, in their eyes, was to protect Nicaraguan histories and identities, *plural*, not just history and identity (Hale, 1997).

The national project of *Sandinismo*, however, was based on the myth of *mestizaje*; the belief that all “Nicaraguans” were *mestizos* united in class struggle (Close, 1999; Hooker, 2005). Sandinistas rejected MISURASATA’s demands for exclusive rights, including political and territorial separation. MISURASATA subsequently broke with the Revolution in 1981 and took up arms with the Contreras (Ortiz, 1987). This was fateful for the Rama people in two ways: It began the near-decade of armed conflict that would follow, which

¹⁴ Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Sandinista All Together.

shattered families on Rama Cay, and later resulted in Atlantic Coast regional autonomy. Intra-clan conflict and clientelist exchange would soon follow.

Decentralization

The Atlantic Coast became two autonomous regions, the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) and the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS), under Law 28 in 1987, which laid the groundwork for nationwide decentralization in the 1990s and early 2000s (Larson, 2002). Nicaragua's decentralization program was, more properly, deconcentration (Larson & Lewis-Mendoza, 2012). Deconcentration is a power transfer from central to lower officials who have upward accountability to the center, whereas democratic decentralization is a power transfer to officials with accountability to local communities (e.g., elected local governments; see Ribot, 2002). Deconcentration may result in the diffusion of clientelist practices to lower level authorities, if such practices exist at the national level (see García-Guadilla & Pérez, 2002).

Likewise, clientelism did not disappear after the Revolution, but remained a core strategy of the main Sandinista and Liberal parties (see Gonzáles-Ocantos, 2012). Sandinistas and Liberal parties vied for RAAN and RAAS regional council seats at the outset. Sandinistas gained strong representation in both regional councils and came to dominate the RAAN, but Liberal parties (e.g., UNO, PLC) came to dominate the RAAS and control the executive *Junta Directiva* (González, 2011). As evidence of deconcentration, party loyalties often took precedence over local concerns (see Brunnegar, 2007).

Grassroots political mobilization during the Revolution (see Booth & Richard, 2006) had brought Ramas and Creoles into the major party structures, which in turn

brought the major party structures into the territory. Rama-Kriol politicians with Liberal affiliations dominated local politics through the 1990s and early 2000s, exercising authority through the traditional council of elders and Liberal-leaning Moravian Church (see Hawley, 1997). Formal territorial decentralization began in 2003 after the Inter-American case *Awas Tingni v. Nicaragua* (2001) and Law 445 (2002) on titling afro-indigenous communal lands, the result of a legal battle over timber exploitation in the Mayangna community of the RAAN (see Chapter IV for more). Liberals dominated the incipient GTR-K (2004-2009) and the first GTR-K electoral cycle (2009-2013). This reflected Liberal dominance at the national and regional level in the same period.

In 2013, however, Rama Sandinistas won the GTR-K elections, and the Liberals lost their territorial political majority. This was part of a broader leftward turn in Nicaragua and Latin America generally (see Escobar, 2010). The Sandinista resurgence was not a democratic victory, however, but the result of Daniel Ortega's political maneuvering as Sandinista opposition leader (1990-2006) and his growing patrimonialism as president (2006-Present). Ortega has waged war on Liberal parties since the 2011 general elections, and Nicaragua has steadily become a one-party state (see Lakhani, 2016). The Liberal retreat accompanies an observed wariness among Rama-Kriol Liberal politicians to express major party affiliations. They also lack party resource flows. The business connections that have sustained Liberal party operatives, out of power, may be drying up (see Guzmán & Pinto, 2008).

Evidence suggests that both Liberal and Sandinista GTR-K leaders have leveraged public monies to reward their loyalists. This is hard to directly observe in the Liberal case. I was not present during the Liberal GTR-K tenure, and Liberals themselves did not speak

openly about clientelism unless Sandinistas were behind it. The same was true of Sandinistas. Anecdotal evidence may be weak, but in conjunction with direct observations and studies attesting to the prevalence of clientelism in Nicaragua (see Gonzales-Ocantos et al., 2012), it suggests that public resource distribution on Rama Cay typically flows through the political networks of those in dominant positions of authority. Before turning my attention to this evidence, I discuss how the Rama Cay Liberal and Sandinista networks came to be.

The Sequelae of War

Local elites' politicization and entry into deconcentrated political structures has roots in the social and personal corollaries of war, universal themes: sorrow, disillusionment, disgust, and the search for justice. War has proven effects on people, whether through violence, loss, or the difficult conditions that result, including, "poverty, social marginalization, isolation, inadequate housing, and changes in family structure and functioning" (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010: 8). War kept Nicaraguans in a perpetual state of anxiety, depression (Quesada, 1998), and terror (Kornbluh, 1988; Summerfield & Toser, 1991). Quesada (1998: 51) describes the Revolution's aftermath as a "ripple effect," with "chronic and lingering" effects, "embodied and lived even after being mediated by time, space, and social status."

The Contra War was a civil war. It tore families apart. The nationally-prominent Chamorro clan is a case study. The assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, a fierce critic of the Somoza dictatorship and owner and editor of the periodical *La Prensa*, triggered the Nicaraguan Revolution (Edmisten, 1990). *La Prensa* turned on the Sandinistas under Pedro's son. Pedro's brother became editor of the pro-Sandinista *El Nuevo Diario*. Violeta

Chamorro, Pedro's widow, would become president in 1990 and dismantle the social and economic programs of the Sandinista Revolution (Close, 1999). The Chamorros were the embodiment of "a nation at odds with itself," whose "private pain...was a microcosm of Nicaragua's national agony" (Edmiston, 1990). If this is true of the Chamorros, it is certainly true of the McCrays, the main political family on Rama Cay. I discuss McCray clan politics in what follows.

Intra-Clan Conflict

The Bible say the foreigner are more closer than your brother. The greatest enemy is your family. And me seen it come to fulfill.

—McCray from the Liberal faction

The McCrays are a prominent political family on Rama Cay, in Rama-Kriol territory, and the broader region. "Family" refers to the McCrays who are descendants of Jesse McCray (d'd.) and Ruth Daniels (d'd.). Because of the small size of the Rama community, nearly everyone is blood-related (Baldi, 2013). McCray, Maccree, Mcree, Mccre, and its variations are the most common Rama surname. While Jesse and Ruth were Somocistas, their children joined in the ideological fervor of the Revolution. They and their own children now head up the Liberal and Sandinista factions on Rama Cay. One of Jesse and Ruth's elder sons is the patriarch of the Liberal faction. The children of his sister, Ida—Héctor and Martina Thomas, President of the GTR-K and Sandinista Concejal to the RAAS, respectively¹⁵—are leaders of the Sandinista faction.

¹⁵ I include the names of Martina and Héctor Thomas, and not the Liberal faction members, because the former are active public figures routinely featured in public media.

Jesse and Ruth's elder son, the Liberal-faction patriarch, received training as a preacher in Puerto Cabezas in the early 1970s (he is henceforth "the Reverend"). The Moravian Church was a vehicle for indigenous organizing (Hawley, 1997), and he became involved in indigenous politics. He was present at MISURASATA's founding in 1979. When MISURASATA broke with the Sandinistas in 1981, he claims to have remained neutral, as a preacher, but would later display clear affinities for Liberal opposition parties (as I will discuss). By contrast, many of his brothers and sisters came to identify as Sandinistas. They would remain so. Close family members served on both sides of the Contra War (1981-1990). Fighting took place in the Rama-Kriol territory, and Rama Cay itself was a garrison for Sandinista soldiers during the war.

The death of a Contra family member, beloved on both sides, was the object of numerous retellings during my fieldwork. It encapsulates, and maybe even heralded, current clan conflict. As the story goes, this relative walked some distance from his jungle encampment one morning to light a cookfire against the warnings of his commanders. The smoke alerted Sandinistas to his presence, and they killed him. Liberal family members place blame on the Sandinista soldiers and Sandinistas at large. Sandinista family members place blame on Contra soldiers, whom, they allege, took him captive to fight against his will. The smoke was a desperate attempt at rescue, or suicide. Both sides of the family blame each other for this tragedy, by extension.

The family member's death caused, "changes in family structure and functioning," (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010: 8) in a literal sense, and because its trauma and other war trauma created family divisions, resentments, and cycles of petty intrigue. A major turning point was when, in or around the Revolution, the Reverend and his young family physically moved from the main McCray vicinaje near the center of the island to the northern

point on Rama Cay, near his church. They crossed Rama Cay's old political and social divide in self exile (see Loveland, 1975; Baldi, 2013). This deepening conflict found political expression over time.

The Reverend's involvement with MISURASATA and the Moravian Church brought him into international circuits. Foreign interests were heavily involved in the Contra-Indigenous insurgency, including the Indian Law Resource Center and Harvard's Cultural Survival, the anti-communist religious right, and the US Congress and CIA (Meringer, 2010). Older members of the family recall taking advantage of opportunities to travel to Europe and North America in the 1980s. His children eventually received training in Nicaragua as lawyers, doctors, nurses, and teachers. His family also cornered the informal tourism economy, providing missionaries, academics [present included], journalists, and others access to Rama Cay and the broader territory.

The Reverend gained moral and political authority through the Moravian Church and as an informal leader of the Rama community after the Contra War's end in 1990. The national rightist revival in the 1990s backdropped his network's political ascendancy. The Liberal network would later be at the forefront of Law 445 demarcation and titling in Rama-Kriol territory (2004-2009). They came to control the GTR-K during its first election cycle (2009-2013). Given the educational, economic, and political opportunities available to his family, the Sandinista faction felt themselves at a disadvantage, a cause for continuing resentment. Disputes over the inheritance of house sites, agricultural lands, accusations of land theft, serious criminality, and official corruption have deepened clan conflict.

When Héctor Thomas, the Reverend's nephew, broke the spell of Liberal dominance by winning the GTR-K presidency in 2013, he began aggressively pushing out remnants of the Liberal network through position and funding cuts, including the Reverend's

daughter. Next, Héctor, Martina, and one of their brothers, an Evangelical preacher, began to attack the Reverend's moral authority by establishing an Evangelical congregation on Rama Cay. This congregation is popular with younger Ramas because it uses a Spanish, not English, Bible. Liberals had overseen early Grand Canal engagements in 2013, fighting and conceding to Grand Canal plans at turns. When Héctor won the GTR-K presidency, he moved rapidly to lease 263-square kilometers of territory to HKND. Disenfranchised Liberals now lead the Grand Canal opposition movement, discussed more below.

Clientelism has figured prominently in McCray clan politics and continues to impact developing Canal politics. Interviewees claim Liberal and Sandinista factions have distributed public resources to their loyalists, to the exclusion of non-loyalists and disfavored kin (see below). It is difficult to determine why Rama Cay residents are Sandinista or Liberal. Loyalist propinquity—for example, Liberals tend to cluster in vicinages near the waterline and in the north of Rama Cay, whereas Sandinistas tend to be in the South—suggests that homophily and kinship are drivers of political membership. More research might precisely determine how factions define and govern membership. I now turn my attention to clientelism's conduct on Rama Cay.

Clientelism's Conduct

Clientelism involves targeting benefits to a group based on past or future political support (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). Benefits are, "limited only by politicians' and voters' imaginations," ranging from, "cash to cookware to corrugated metal [to] jobs, access to public services such as housing, education, or healthcare," to name a few (Hicken, 2011:

291). Communities lacking these things—poorer areas—are more prone to clientelist exchange (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Remmer, 2007; Bustikova & Corduneanu-Huci, 2009).

Clientelism can involve chains of broker relationships from top to bottom of the political order, a series of “personal, dyadic relationships,” where, at the very bottom, brokers whip votes for parties relying on their local knowledge and influence as public, organizational, or private community leaders (Hicken, 2011: 291; Kitschelt, 2000). Not all patrons and brokers are created equally, however. Some vary by the resources they can access. For example, Sandinistas and Liberal parties engage in clientelism in and out of power, but Sandinistas have relied, since 2008, on a public resource monopoly, and Liberals their “strong ties” with business interests (Gonzales-Ocantos et al., 2012: 207; Guzmán & Pinto, 2008).

In the following section, I will discuss clientelism on Rama Cay with attention to how it operates through poverty. Poverty has demand- and supply-side effects on the operation of clientelism on Rama Cay. This manifests unevenly between the factions. Among the ordinary people of Rama Cay, widespread poverty, limited opportunities, environmental, and economic change produce a logic of clientelist exchange. Though rich in connections, education, and political power, brokers themselves are only marginally better-off than ordinary Ramas. Those out of power, Liberals, therefore lack the resources to engage in clientelism without strong party or private sector connections. They come to rely on programmatic strategies as they devote their energies to the Grand Canal opposition movement. Using Shefter’s (1977) terminology, Sandinistas have become *internally mobilized*, whereas Liberals have become *externally mobilized*.

Surviving Rama Cay

Fifty-five-year-old Rogelio lives in a house of wood and palm. He has no regular occupation. The twenty or so relatives in his vicinage are lucky to eat twice a day. They pool resources. Some fish and plant crops. A few are teachers or nurses with government salaries. Some fetch wage or temp labor, known as *chamba*, when they can. Church or academic tourists stay the night and bring food or money sometimes. Life got harder when the fishing cooperative folded. Rogelio couldn't get equipment or transportation. He has been unable to replace the 250 USD gill net someone stole. His shrimp net took weeks to weave, but proved useless. "The *mestizo* them put chemic [chemicals] in the water," he told me. No one has seen shrimp in good quantity for years. A swashbuckling Texan came through a few weeks ago offering oyster jobs in Galveston. Rogelio couldn't get the money to renew his passport. His only remaining option, this time of year, is to work seawall construction on Rama Cay. Unfortunately, only non-Ramas from Bluefields and Sandinistas get those jobs.

If people are poor and lack many alternative sources of livelihood, they are more susceptible to clientelist political mobilization strategies, provided they have opportunities to access patronage (cf. Bustikova & Corduneanu-Huci, 2009). Scholars advance several explanations for this: the greater marginal utility of material benefits to the poor (the law of diminishing marginal utility) makes patronage more attractive to them; programmatic policies have less impact on voter well-being in less-developed economies, whereas particularistic distribution is more impactful; clientelist networks have lesser physical and occupation mobility, and so are easier to monitor and maintain as clients; the poor are more risk-averse, and other explanations (Hicken, 2011). Whatever the causal connections,

poverty, limited physical and occupational mobility, and clientelism are all present on Rama Cay.

Rama-Kriol communities struggle to access potable water, hygienic and health facilities, transportation, adequate housing, and monetary income, engaging in traditional subsistence activities that generate low returns (see GTR-K, 2007). Official unemployment in the RAAS was 11.8 per cent in 2005 (INIDE, 2005). Official statistics do not distinguish between subsistence livelihoods, temporary labor, wage labor, salaried positions, etc., and so these statistics are not terribly informative. Local leaders in Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas, the largest urban economies in the RAAS and RAAN respectively, report an actual unemployment rate of 90 percent or more (Vandermeer & Perfecto, 2013; Jamieson, 1999). The truth is likely somewhere in between. Rama Cay interviewees commonly report only finding employment in day labor (*chamba*), seasonal agricultural hire, or jobs in other regions and abroad, typically in the Caribbean cruise industry. Cash is a rare commodity.

Land colonization and environmental change amplify these challenges. Limited access to housing on Rama Cay puts this into perspective. During fieldwork, I helped Rogelio recycle rotting boards off his house. We used spare wood from his sister's new house, which she built using her husband's remittances from the Caymans. Rogelio explained that wood was hard to come by. Nearly impossible, in fact, despite the size of Rama-Kriol territory and its remaining forests. Tree species suited to dwellings had been lost to land conversion, natural disasters (such as hurricanes), strict conservation regulations, and, most significantly, land occupation. Colonists charged a premium for trees and lumber. As one elder said, "[T]he woods in the jungle getting less. Getting less. Well, that's what the Spaniard them [did], coming in from the Pacific on our own territory, and we can't go in the jungle like anyone. No, you have to get permission. You have to pay money for get that

lumber.” Consequently, Ramas had come to live four or five generations to a single house. The same problem has put limits on canoe (*dory*) construction, with effects on physical mobility.

The presence of land colonists has also limited direct forms of entitlement, such as subsistence activities. Per one elder, “We [used to] have plenty animals. What can you say? Richness. But now finish. Now is worse because they take our land. Build farm and build houses.” Colonization has also encouraged Ramas to sell off family lands in distress sales due to the reported need for money, fear of hostile migrants and land theft, and inability to manage crop failure and disease, or pressure from corrupt government officials and lawyers.

Fisheries and wild animal populations are also in decline. Biological data are lacking, but anecdotal evidence suggests declining animal and fish yields on the Atlantic Coast generally (Hostetler, 2000). Local leaders in nearby Pearl Lagoon, for example, report two decades of declining finfish and shrimp populations (Schmitt & Kramer, 2009). An academic studying Rama fisheries while I was on Rama Cay attributed this to overfishing and probable biophysical factors. Local middlemen confirmed the former, expressing confusion over declining yields, but mostly attributing it to colonists’ use of dynamite and poison in local waterways.

Declining fish populations have left Ramas searching for new species to exploit. *Pepinos*, or sea cucumbers, are the latest buzz because of demand from Asia. Dive-fishing is not a Rama cultural practice, but some have taken it upon themselves to learn it. Cultural transformations like this can open new doors, or can be the cause and consequence of acute economic hardship. In that vein, interviewees report cultural changes that have put limits on traditional livelihoods. Elders view younger generations as uninterested in

the old way of living, preferring cash income and the trappings of modern life as they grow to imitate dominant society: “Young people, they say I want to work to have money. They don’t want to paddle like the Rama did. ...If they friend have a cement house, building, computer, or a cell phone, television, you could say they want it, too.”

Alcohol and drug abuse have also reportedly vitiated ambitions toward a traditional lifestyle. Growing disfavor with traditional animal and crop varieties has grown alongside the adoption of non-traditional diets: “We try to do what next culture they practice. We use different spices. So, the food is not cooking like before. Just natural things, herbs. ... Now everybody want to drink Coke. ... [And] everyone used to eat fish. Now they want to eat chicken.” The money economy has reportedly created an ethic of individualism and personal gain that disrupts the communal spirit at the heart of the traditional economy:

People used to go hunt *wary* [wild boar]. Say they kill the *wary*? They bring and used to share. They never used to sell. And they go to hunt *manty* [manatee]. Ring the bell. Make the people to come to get food, to eat. If someone going to build a house, they just tell the leaders them. Five houses, one day finish. Palm leaf houses. By this time, we no have that collaboration. We no have people to help one another.

Withal, Rama Cay residents continue to eke out a living relying on social networks of residence and kinship. This is a common form of social and economic organization in urban and rural Latin America (Auyero et al., 2000). Rama Cay consists of family *vicinages* (Baldi, 2013) that engage in subsistence and/or money-generating activities that, “coagulate into a poor and social protected way of life,” or what Enzo Mingione calls, “the popular economy” (1991: 87; see also, Auyero et al., 2000). Rama Cay *vicinages* share subsistence goods internally and channel surpluses into economic exchange with other *vicinages* or outside markets.

Members of *vicinages* have varying sources of livelihood and income, like in Rogelio's story above. *Vicinages* themselves may specialize in the sale of middlemen services, basic goods, fuel, knowledge of traditional medicine and crafts, and others. Poverty, and the growing limits on social security and survival outlined here, make patronage a valuable household supplement or stopgap. Grand Canal politics demonstrate that this makes Ramas susceptible to the state's economic and political ambitions in the territory. This trend may increase if the traditional economy further stagnates and informal networks of help continue to blend with political networks over time (cf. Auyero et al., 2009).

Patronage Distribution

Party brokers enter the fray to smooth household consumption, provide jobs, and housing where Rama Cay residents struggle to secure employment and direct forms of entitlement. This includes the provision of food products, chickens, pigs, cows, sheet metal for roofing (among others), and, most recently, houses. It also includes the provision of patronage jobs in administrative, education, and health sectors and temp or long-term wage labor on government projects in the territory. Brokers can also bring limited connections to bear for job opportunities in the private sphere, including in other regions and abroad. Distribution of these resources is clientelistic because it rewards and expects continued loyalty to island brokers and the larger party structures they represent (see Hicken, 2011).

It is difficult to provide empirical evidence of actual vote-buying in any context (Gonzales-Ocantos et al., 2012), the Holy Grail of clientelism. As alluded to before, interviewees would rarely discuss clientelist distribution on their own side of the aisle. Asking interviewees about vote-buying can produce biased inferences, particularly in Nicaragua,

where vote-buying is heavily stigmatized (Gonzales-Ocantos et al., 2012). Uneven distribution of material and nonmaterial benefits on Rama Cay strongly suggests the existence of clientelist forms of exchange, however. Interviewee data and observations attest to the fact that public resource distribution flows through the political networks of those who are in dominant positions of authority. Resource distribution on Rama Cay appears biased toward faction loyalists.

The most visible manifestation is the 2015 government housing project. As discussed, family vicinages could no longer supply housing to their members due to the scarcity of suitable tree species. Four or five generations had come to live under a single roof. This produced public health and safety concerns due to the design of traditional ground-floor and semi-traditional stilted houses, which often feature small, crowded common spaces; lack easy access to hygienic facilities; and use wood-burning stoves in confined quarters. The new houses are of woeful quality and have produced significant health and safety concerns of their own (Lacayo, 2016).

Interviewees, for example, report developing painful rashes when leaning on fiber walls, which leach chemicals during the rains. The fiber flooring has not lasted more than a year on most houses and often shatters under foot. Bad flooring has caused injuries. At a dance party, fifteen or so people fell a story to the ground. In another case, a woman fell nearly two stories from her kitchen onto sharp oyster shells and went to hospital. The houses are also poorly insulated and ventilated, often making them too hot or too cold. They feature indoor latrines, but have inadequate plumbing. Sewage has backed up into many houses. Some interviewees have also noted diminishing groundwater quality since housing construction. The new concrete paths leading to many of the houses are also heavily stippled, pooling rainwater that interviewees say attracts mosquitos and illness.

Martina Thomas, Sandinista Concejal to the RAAS and Rama Cay resident, told me that the government is working to bring in 15,000 feet of lumber to replace the flooring. This is too little, too late, for some. The government promised that the houses would be concrete, last a hundred years, and withstand hurricanes, but this is not the case. The houses are substandard, and they have begun to produce hard-to-dispose-of litter all over the island as they have fallen apart. They cost \$15,000, on average, but were free to Rama Cay residents. The average wood house costs \$3,000, lasts for fifteen years, but is unobtainable for most. Those who live in government houses tend to view some improvement as preferable to no improvement, and tend to place blame for the poor quality of housing on unscrupulous contractors who purchased substandard materials and pocketed the difference. Nonetheless, interviewees report that young people now have the space to start families; have reduced respiratory illnesses due to gas stoves; and have more privacy.

Criticism of the houses may carry risks of losing access to future benefits. To begin with, not everyone received the houses. Their actual distribution is stark. The South is replete with new government housing. The North and areas near the waterline almost entirely lack them. Their distribution follows a social and political divide that Loveland (1975) and most recently Baldi (2013) have observed on Rama Cay. Pro-Sandinista Ramas tend to occupy the South, whereas pro-Liberal Ramas tend to occupy the waterline and the North, where the Reverend's church and vicinage are located. Loyalist distribution of food, livestock, zinc roofing, and other common government handouts is less observable, but interviewees maintain that these also go to loyalists. Per one Liberal elder, if you are a non-loyalist, you lose, "the opportunity to get the donation. Rice, beans, chicken, pig, sheet of zinc. Concejal hear you talk bad about the party, they say, 'We don't give you no more help'."

Nonmaterial benefits also skew toward loyalists, including salaried patronage jobs in government administrative, health, education sectors, and temporary or long-term jobs on government projects. Some of these jobs (e.g., teaching, nursing) tend to have more party overlap. This may be because they are relatively tenured. Still, they either require fealty to the dominant party, the appearance of fealty, or the appearance of being nonaligned. Liberals who have retained government teaching jobs on Rama Cay, for example, report occupational or personal risks for engaging in political speech.

One longtime Sandinista and teacher confirmed that such coercion exists. Dissension is not allowed, because, “They say we are leader. And you can’t be equal like other people.” Administrative jobs in the GTR-K are almost off-limits to Liberals at present. Sandinistas defunded or deactivated key positions Liberals had occupied before 2013, even an elected position. As for temporary or long-term jobs as labor on government projects, the following exchange with an extremely poor Rama man named Valerio, who relies on day labor (*chamba*) because he sold his land in a distress sale, is illustrative:

Valerio: They no give me work. The [Sandinista] Concejal they know that, them know that we need work. But they don’t give me work. ... Some day we no eat, no money.

Me: You think it’s politics?

Valerio: Politics, yeah. You right what you say. Them no get everybody. Them wanna get who them wanna get.

Me: Like people in the *Frente* [Sandinistas]?

Valerio: *Correcto.*

But why, after all, do Rama brokers target known political loyalists? The imperative of political parties is to grow their voter base. Stokes et al. (2013) note this paradox, supplying empirical evidence of this practice in multiple countries. This tendency has had marked effects on Rama Cay politics. The motivation to target political loyalists does not simply exist in the neoclassical realm of efficient network-building (see, for e.g., Stokes et al., 2013), but has an affective element of *personal loyalty*. Rama Cay brokers “know”

known loyalists, in part, through relationships and affective bonds they forged in and around the Revolution and Contra War: bonds rooted in ideology, consanguinity, fictive kinship, shared experience, and struggle. These bonds may also be heritable and correlate to settlement patterns. Loyalist distribution strategies thus, in part, institutionalize old Contra War conflicts. They limit the addition of new voters into Rama Cay political networks (cf. Stokes et al., 2013), creating network boundary-hardness. As I discuss in the following, boundary hardness produces network durability, but also limits the reach of programmatic politics.

“Broke” Brokership

Nicaragua is unique in Central America, because it has side-by-side political machines that engage in clientelism both in and out of power (Gonzales-Ocanto et al., 2012; Guzmán & Pinto, 2008). This may be changing as Ortega’s growingly patrimonial regime marginalizes Liberal parties. Local politics on Rama Cay differ from national politics, because Liberal brokers are unable to secure resources for their loyalists without access to the public coffer. This could be due to their ambivalent party affiliations: Liberal brokers were chary to express any. They may thus lack any connection to Liberal parties and their business connections in turn. This is potentially a symptom of the broader Liberal retreat on the national political stage.

A lack of disposable personal wealth and income is another factor. Brokers *do* tend to have better housing (sometimes concrete), transportation, and salaries than the average Rama. This does not enable them to distribute patronage under their own power. Their organizational and private connections are also highly circumscribed. NGO and other non-profit backers may provide non-discretionary funds, such as the thousands (USD)

Liberals received to renovate the Moravian Church, or monies they obtained to travel to Washington, D.C. to testify before the IACHR on the Grand Canal. A prominent Liberal recently secured more than a dozen jobs for Ramas on Galveston oyster boats, but claims to have distributed these jobs to Liberals and Sandinistas alike.¹⁶ Efforts at generalized distribution may signal a bid to curry favor with swing-voters in a time of disenfranchisement.

Without distributable resources, Liberals have a more limited menu of political strategies at their disposal. Programmatic strategies have come to the fore. Programmatic strategies are those that use universalizing appeals over particularistic distribution of resources to mobilize voters. Universalizing rhetoric has fewer upfront costs than patronage, but may have lesser, harder-to-monitor impacts on voter behavior (see Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). The Liberal uptake of programmatic politics is central to Grand Canal politics, the subject of my final section.

Clan and Canal

Aguardiente. I planted my forefeet on the riverbank as my compadre shimmied a tree to nick limes for aguardiente. The soil was greasy and muddy and a wave of it clung to my ankles as I slid back to the waterline. I felt small rocks and roots in my heels. Red flies attacked me. Our trip to Tiktik ended in this Sisyphean task and would end in another. When I hoofed it up to a signpost, a signpost myself to the stereotypical chele ill-at-ease with his surroundings, I rested in its shadow. It didn't say welcome to Tiktik Kaanu, pop. 103. It was from President Ortega, who boasted down to the dollars and cents the money he had

¹⁶ Several Liberal interviewees said that the businessman expressed a preference for “contra” over “communist” workers, however.

pumped into the village. I watched a sow trot under a streetlamp that lit a place with no street. Rumor had it someone called the police. We came in a government fast-boat taken on false pretenses. I was with the Canal truth commission, observing. They were old political insiders, now outsiders, who hoped to collect signatures exposing the Canal FPIC process as a fraud. If half the townsfolk hadn't gone up river to play baseball, they could've ticked Tik-tik's box. Twenty villagers showed up to the meeting at the decaying school house. Some villagers spoke impassioned. Others looked bored. Others took nacatamales and orange soda and left. An old man of eighty stumbled up and took snacks as he wandered out. They said he often got lost on the way home. He only ate green bananas he could forage. I felt bad for the villagers: The sting of privation tangled with Sandinistas' suspect assurances of a better life and Liberals' subterfuge. Baseball may have been a better option, after all.

Shefter (1977; see also, Hicken, 2011) refers to parties that are shut out of power and lack access to public resources as “externally mobilized.” These parties rely on universal appeals over particularistic distribution strategies to maintain or gain votes. They become, “activated to conduct politics by other collective means,” in the words of Auyero et al. (2009: 12). Social movements research amply demonstrates that, “prior social ties [and] established social settings are the locus of movement emergence” (Diani & McAdam, 2003: 7; see Auyero et al., 2009).

The Grand Canal and indigenous rights ideologies provided a platform for Liberals' external mobilization and political expression. The opposition espouses commonly-held indigenous ideologies, though Sandinistas disagree on the merits of the opposition's claims. The opposition's programmatic appeals have an overt political motive and conceal fears of exclusion from Grand Canal benefits. Movement leaders have created the Grand Canal truth commission as a platform, in part, to discredit and seek removal of Sandinista

leaders. Sandinista interviewees sense this and remain unpersuaded. Liberals' perceived untrustworthiness is a legacy of loyalist distribution strategies, which have thus hardened network boundaries and limited the impact of Liberal programmatic politics. The past and present material support of Sandinista politicians gives Sandinista interviewees guarded faith in the Canal.

Birth of a Movement

You find one or two leaders, Rama, against this project. Why? One: They not in favor of the government. Two: personal position. Three: money.

—Sandinista Rama

Liberals began fighting the Grand Canal before losing control of the GTR-K, albeit ambivalently. Famed human rights defender and then-attorney to the GTR-K María Luisa Acosta filed domestic suit against the Canal concession law (No. 840) in July 2013. The Supreme Court invalidated this challenge and 31 other lawsuits on various grounds (Liedel, 2015). In August 2013, the Sandinista faction took over the GTR-K presidency. Before their transition from power, Liberals engaged in a mix of public resistance and backroom acquiescence to the Grand Canal. In November, the Liberal GTR-K permitted an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) with the proviso that it not green-light the project. Liberal leadership claim they granted the permit under company and government threats (Liedel, 2015). Several independent Liberal and Sandinista sources informed me, however, that Liberal leadership accepted bribes.

Despite a national Sandinista resurgence and Ortega's growing crackdown on opposition parties, the Sandinista victory was a fluke. Nasario Martínez won the presidency by vote of the territorial council. A former Liberal ally and leader of Tiktik Kaanu, he was to replace the Liberal president Santiago Thomas. A Kriol communal leader from Monkey

Point, Alan Claire Duncan, was unhappy Nasario won, believing it was time a Kriol preside over the GTR-K. He sabotaged Nasario's victory when he outed both himself and Nasario as having conspired to sell Rama lands. Nasario's runner-up, Héctor Thomas—the Reverend's nephew and brother to the regional Sandinista Concejal, Martina Thomas—assumed the presidency. Héctor and Nasario later became allies. When Héctor began his tenure in January 2014, he defunded Alan (an elected official), Acosta, and her legal assistant, Becky McCray, the latter of whom is a close family member.

Acosta, Alan, and McCray formed a Grand Canal opposition movement. Acosta and McCray filed with the IACHR in June 2014, alleging a lack of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) during Law 840 drafting. They next formed a truth commission to campaign against the Canal and GTR-K leadership in the nine Rama-Kriol communities. Sandinistas had inherited the Canal process and began conducting consultations in the nine communities. On May 3, 2016, Héctor Thomas and the nine community leaders signed a consent agreement affirming FPIC, committing to perpetual lease of 263-square kilometers to HKND. Truth commission leaders allege the GTR-K engaged in document fraud to gather signatures. They traveled to Managua in May 2016, along with the leaders of Bangkukuk and Wiring Cay, to protest the agreement in a televised broadcast. They continued campaigning in the nine communities afterward, educating Ramas on FPIC and seeking to build political momentum against Héctor and Nasario.

Nasario's sabotage and the Liberal ouster gave Sandinistas control of the GTR-K and externally mobilized Liberal leaders. Truth commission leaders are open about not being against a canal, *per se*. Their gripe is with the consultation process and the leaders who conducted it. As one opposition leader said at a truth commission meeting, "We not say no to the Grand Canal, *ni* (neither) yes. All what we did say is, do this thing in a good

way, and the leaders them do something bad.” The genesis of the opposition movement is inseparable from a political act—the ouster of three Liberal leaders at the GTR-K. External mobilization gave certainty to their fight against the Canal, formerly ambivalent and marked by personal-enrichment seeking at the GTR-K. Patterns of loyalist distribution create the impression that Sandinistas will work to exclude Liberals from Canal benefits, even if they may not retain control of the GTR-K through the next election cycle. As one Liberal woman told me, “We not get nothing, them say. Don’t like we, them say. The Canal apply and approve, then we mustn’t beg nothing.”

Birth of Insouciance

The Sandinista them no want the Canal [but] them afraid for say ‘no’. Because them say ‘no’, [they are afraid] we gonna get no nothing.

—Liberal Rama Cay Resident

Liberals’ programmatic campaign against the Grand Canal has not persuaded Sandinista interviewees, even though indigenous ideologies are commonly held. Revolutionary and indigenous ideologies have had an uneasy relationship on the Atlantic Coast (see Cleary, 2000; Meringer, 2010), but articulate in the minds of Sandinista interviewees. One Sandinista elder told me, “If I am a revolutionary that have to defend indigenous right, I will defend. If we have to get with the Reverend and join to fight, we have to get together.” Secondly, a legacy of loyalist distribution infects the Liberal campaign with a perceived disingenuousness, contributing to further boundary hardness between the factions. Third, the material drivers of fealty are in full effect, promoting acquiescence to Sandinista leadership and demobilization.

Sandinista interviewees agree that FPIC is a fundamental right, but disagree with Liberals’ central claim that the FPIC process was not up to standard. They also lack faith in

Liberals' motives. One Sandinista mused on the Grand Canal opposition's thinking: "[Liberals] say this man making money like I used to. So, that's the same one what's against it." In other words, Liberals are jealous non-beneficiaries, mourn a loss of control over the Canal, fear exclusion for themselves and their loyalists, and so have come out against the Canal.

Sandinistas perceive truth commission campaigns as following old patterns of exclusion, as well. Interviewees repeatedly stipulated to the truth commission meeting held on Rama Cay in the Reverend's church, away from the public meeting house, to the exclusion of Sandinistas. Some mentioned the presence Kriol, Spaniard, and White "foreign elements" at this meeting. This is a residue of the Contra War. Rama Liberals have been enmeshed in outside and foreign circuits since then, a long-time cause of suspicion and resentment. In the words of one interviewee:

I never did went to the [truth commission] meeting. Because I never did invited. And I didn't want to participate. They go to certain people. They avoid certain people. They bring a Spanish man from the government, a Liberal. And that don't mean I hate the Liberal people. What I mean, the meeting is political.... What I see: This invitation only go out to what is PLC people, red people, Liberal.

Beyond suspicion of Liberal motives, Sandinistas express guarded faith in GTR-K leadership because of their proactiveness and largess. Liberals did not bring project benefits to Sandinistas in the past. Per one Sandinista, "There were plenty feuds [under the Liberals]. A lot of projects the community don't know what they do. They don't [give] us information about those projects." In contrast, Sandinista officials have provided housing, project benefits, and handouts. This creates minimal assurances in Canal plans. Those in support of the Canal tend to be Sandinistas *cum* recipients of party largess:

Nurse with government house: Well, I think part of it [Sandinistas are] fulfilling. We have a little building, a shelter for our home. They promise

and they give. We have free education. We have student them that preparing [in] the university is Rama. The parents them not paying for the school fees.

Elderly woman with government house: Well myself, I don't know because we no have [a Canal]. We no see it yet. But our communal government tell we that the government of the country, Daniel [Ortega, the President], him a' help us.

Man who relies on *chamba*: I trust them, yeah. Done give we promise them.

Young man who received handouts: I don't trust no one. But have to. Trust for say he gonna do things? Sure, maybe. Right now, [Sandinista] projects coming in about coconuts, fowls.

Public sector employees also tend to express Canal support, even ones who might not privately identify as Sandinista. As one Liberal elder said, "The only one gaining a salary from the government is the teacher, the nurse, the counsel. So, if they talk bad about the government, they get fired. They don't want to lose they job." One interviewee moonlights as a government worker in Bluefields, for example, and is under constant threat of losing their job (or worse) due to Grand Canal opposition-related activities. A Sandinista teacher told me, "To be sincere with you, I am part of the government. And what they told us—You can't be against the project."

Besides coercion, government salaries demand enough time and provide sufficient income that subsistence activities are difficult to carry on. One teacher told me, "I plant one, two *manzana* [2 to 4 acres]. I no have chance to do [more] because I busy in the classroom." This reliance on government salaries promotes acquiescence. In contrast, a woman who claimed to be self-sufficient said, "I no think about money because always we live in our territory. Fishing and plant the *breadkine* [bananas] to the bush. We no need Chinese money."

Cisma Comunitario

I have attempted to provide an understanding of divided community responses to the Grand Canal on Rama Cay, the political and population nucleus of the Rama community. To do so, I examined clientelism, the distribution of resources for political loyalty, and vice versa. Liberals' external mobilization has recommended the use of programmatic political strategies against the Grand Canal, while Sandinistas remain supportive of the Grand Canal under the sway of patronage. I began with a broad history of Nicaraguan politics to contextualize clientelist distribution on Rama Cay. I attempted to understand the shifting strategies of the Liberal political network in terms of this broader history and political climate, including boundary hardness, which is the product of brokered, loyalist exchange with a strong affective undercurrent: Namely, the sequelae of war. I thus attempted to contribute new insights into the operation of clientelism in resource-poor, post-conflict environments, and how this can produce divided community responses to large-scale land acquisitions.

My intention was not to question the authenticity of Liberals' claims. Indigenous rights are sacrosanct for both island Liberals and Sandinistas. Out of power, however, Liberals have fewer means to conduct politics at their disposal. Opposing the Grand Canal presents itself as one way to do so; to reaffirm the rights that Ramas hold dear, maintain the political network, and attempt to wrest control back from the opposed faction. To not do so, furthermore, puts Liberals' future ability to secure resources at risk, given the history of loyalist distribution on the island.

CHAPTER V. RIVER'S END

I couldn't have anticipated sweating it out in a musty lodge in Bluefields when I was scampering up Karst formations at Gunung Mulu—even in the throes of incipient Dengue. A life of travel is a charmed one. I learned, early on, that only the most privileged travel for leisure, or to ask probing questions about the human condition. I am a tourist and a white man. A cook, by trade, who can hold court with *Comandantes*. I am aware of my privilege. My experience and knowledge have formed in places very far from where I like to hang my hat. And it is hard to find what unites the struggles of disparate peoples in far-flung corners of the world. Through it all, I have come to view the harder ontological questions surrounding indigeneity, in particular, —what, *after all*, it is—as unimportant. We are all united in some basic sense.

It is true that a Kajang, an Innu, a Rama, a Garifuna, and an insert-indigenous-person-here could walk into a bar and [insert joke here]. Indigenous peoples are a motley crew of motley crews. Not united by much, *especially* because they identify as indigenous. Indigeneity has become the coat-rack of alterity. It is, itself, a liminal space of being and becoming. Indigenous cultural practice, the heart of the indigenous cultural practitioner, they are not artefacts. Cormac McCarthy's (1985: 54) devastating portrayal of Southwest Indians in *Blood Meridian* depicts feverishly-interpellated beings in the teeth of constant conquest, riding out in the breastplates and wedding veils of dismembered Hegemons, horrible and nonsensical in the eyes of Whites presuming to be the torchbearers of good history:

A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained wedding veil and some in headgear or crane feathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeontailed coat worn backwards and otherwise naked and one in the armor of a Spanish conquistador, the breastplate and pauldrons deeply dented with old blows of mace or sabre done in another country by men whose very bones were dust and many with their braids spliced up with the hair of other beasts until they trailed upon the ground and their horses' ears and tails worked with bits of brightly colored cloth and one whose horse's whole head was painted crimson red and all the horsemen's faces gaudy and grotesque with daubings like a company of mounted clowns, death hilarious, all howling in a barbarous tongue and riding down upon them like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of Christian reckoning, screeching and yammering and clothed in smoke like those vaporous beings in regions beyond right knowing where the eye wanders and the lip jerks and drools.

Indigeneity has in mind a utopian vision. To provide spaces for alterity, self-determination, yes, but also to protect historically marginalized and abused peoples whose lifeways and needs are conventionally incognizable under law. To bring them under universal human rights frameworks, finally. This is one opinion, at least, and certainly mine. It does not matter *who* is indigenous, but *what* indigenous rights frameworks can do for people. But like any worldview cum policy discourse cum set of practices, indigenous peoples law and policy, in all its forms, takes a stab at transforming a complex and poorly-understood world. The responsibility of intellectuals, indeed those who are *vastly* more qualified than I, is to hold the multicultural project to account: For the benefit of marginalized peoples who labor under its prescriptions.

In this thesis, I have tried—as knowledge, tools, time, and resources have permitted—to begin to understand Ramas' land situation, particularly in view of the *Gran Canal* lingering-undead. To do so, I have explored three cross-cutting themes: rhetoric of support for the Grand Canal, interethnic land conflict, and divided community responses. In a

grander sense, I hope to have communicated the messy reality of life on the Nicaraguan indigenous frontier. Law, as I mentioned in Chapter I, *Headwaters*, is always Something v. Something—David v. Goliath, Amerindian v. Modernization, *Awes Tingni v. Nicaragua*. Although human rights law practitioners are intimately acquainted with the enormous, conflictual gray mass of facts underlying their legal arguments, their legal victories accumulate by the shelfload in the blackletter prescriptions of the ultimate deciders of our globalizing world: multinational organizations, international legal bodies, and the like. But to what effect?

As I discussed in Chapter II, *Canaleamiento*, the Rama people have struggled to locate their vision of a more just and equitable world at the conflux of two rapids: neoliberalization and multicultural reform. Both structure and agency play a role in Grand Canal politics. Limited spaces of recognition enlist people to the march of capitalist accumulation. More than this, the Canal offers hope for a better life. This banishes the high-minded *convivencia* (coexistence) of Rama policy to indifference toward racial hierarchy and structural inequality, like neoliberalization itself. To be sure, Ramas and Kriols are nominally better protected than the peasants who occupy their communal titled lands; people who, like non-indigenous peasants globally, exist on the constant verge of dispossession and humanitarian crisis, where human rights law has failed to protect them (see Núñez, 2012).

Relatedly, in Chapter III, *By Blood and Soil*, I have discussed the situation of low trust among interviewees for land colonists. This speaks to the fragility of the Rama-Kriol common property regime, which lacks a minimum of social underwriting for existing rules and regulations, which furthermore suffer from a lack of state backing. This speaks to deeper problems of collective title implementation in Latin America, which Stocks (2005)

earlier identified: (1) too much for too few; (2) the paradox of decentralization; (3) the weakness of indigenous governing institutions; and (4) time as enemy.

Indigenous peoples in Latin America have laid claim to large land-areas relative to their population sizes, where many political and economic interests want the land (see Stocks, 2005). This has eroded political will among central authorities to enforce those land claims. At stake is national development. The case is stark in Rama-Kriol territory, where 1,900 people lay claim to roughly 1-square km of land per person, in a country that can accommodate 49 people per square kilometer, on average.¹⁷ Landlessness has been a major driver of emigration to the Atlantic Coast (see Chapter IV). Ninety per cent of Nicaraguan rural households earn part of their income from agriculture (van den Berg, 2010). Thirty-eight per cent of these households are landless, a statistic that reaches fifty-five per cent on the Pacific coast (Corral & Reardon, 2001). Issues of distributive justice are a major blind spot in the collective titling program, which Rama-Kriol officials tacitly recognize in their *saneamiento* program of *convivencia*. A lack of cooperation, however, threatens to intensify the structural inequality of landlessness.

Related to areal claims is what Stocks (2005: 97) describes as the, “increasing debility of states in the central exercise of power—a defect directly correlated with neoliberal decentralization.” Decentralization has given indigenous peoples political spaces in which to assert themselves, but has also made titled lands more difficult to control. The actual power of central authorities on the Atlantic Coast is limited, historically (see Hale, 2011). Despite a responsibility to assist in *saneamiento* of title, unclear is whether the central state, in its power, can. Relatedly, indigenous institutions, such as the GTR-K, suffer from

¹⁷ These are rough estimates for illustration only, based on 2200 square-km of land for 1900 Ramas, and 130,500 square kilometers for 6.5 million Nicaraguans.

a lack of manpower, funding, expertise, and legitimacy. The number of counter-claimants has blossomed in this weak, decentered environment. This conceivably diminishes central political will, and the administrative capacity to enforce communal title as time moves on.

Finally, in Chapter IV, *Pueblo Chico*, I have discussed divided community responses to the Grand Canal on Rama Cay. This chapter demonstrates that supply and demand-side factors influencing the conduct of clientelism can both muzzle the poor and recommend programmatic politics to those out of power. The loyalism commonly underlying brokered clientelist exchange, however, may limit the scalability of programmatic politics by contributing to network boundary-hardness. Loyalism is not merely political, on Rama Cay, but based on bonds of personal loyalty forged in the Contra War, which transcend consanguinity; encompassing kin, fictive kin, and neighbors, to the exclusion of hostile kin, etc. This provides small insight into how large-scale land deals may unfurl in resource-poor, post-conflict environments. Ultimately, poverty, clientelist exchange, and community in-fighting ease the flow of investor capital onto the Rama-Kriol frontier.

Looking Forward Looking Backward

Like all studies, this study labored under certain constraints that impacted the quality of its insights and conclusions. With benefit of hindsight, I see areas for improvement and future research. Firstly, I am at risk of overstating the power of rhetoric viewing the Grand Canal as a territorial strategy. This has purchase among GTR-K leadership and some Canal supporters, but other supporters did not spontaneously express this view. I am confident, however, that this rationale accomplishes the merger of multicultural and neoliberal worldviews, a political necessity for leaders who must sell their community on a trait-making development project running through the heart of the ancestral territory. It

is also the seeming, logical extension of institutional and identitarian transformations that have occurred over time.

Notably lacking, as well, was any serious observation of mainland activities. This was difficult to achieve due to time and costs. I base the “heat map” of tensions and polarities between land colonist and Ramas purely on interviewee data. This can function as a very blunt heuristic, but does not account for the microterrain of interaction between Ramas and land colonists. Such insights would provide a fuller understanding of trust and cooperation in the territory. Relatedly, I cannot comment, in detail, on prior or existing *saneamiento* efforts. This data would prove invaluable for understanding formal spaces of interface and relationship-building, an oversight of this research.

Finally, I was not able to observe or define precisely *how* membership in Liberal or Sandinista networks is defined or governed. Liberals were chary to express party affiliations. Sandinistas were less so. Nonetheless, talk of belonging to political factions had clear negative connotations. *Politics* were destroying the community. Nobody wanted to be associated with *politics*. *Politics* was a dirty word. In short, it would take a lot more research to disentangle the *whys* of Liberal and Sandinista membership. For those who were adults in the 1980s, membership had direct origins in the Contra War. But for others, it is likely heritable, sensitive to settlement patterns, and other factors I did not fully observe, a richness I cannot draw from.

My findings nonetheless yield a root policy suggestion: The dire need for central authorities’ cooperation in Rama-Kriol *saneamiento* (and indeed all *saneamiento* processes on the Atlantic Coast). The GTR-K has struggled to do *saneamiento* alone. This accompanies rapid land use changes, growing limits on sources of livelihood, and growing ethno-

territorialism. The policy of *convivencia* underlying the Rama-Kriol *saneamiento* framework, if revived, can provide the basis for a longer-term, Rama-Kriol-colonist co-management regime in the territory. This may improve conservation outcomes, help to relieve limits on direct entitlements, and help to ensure that communal titling does not lurch toward ethnoterritorial exclusivism.

In the case of the latter, indigenous communities can work to absorb landless people who come in search of a livelihood, on negotiated terms. This may begin to resolve some of the inherent tensions between communal title and distributive justice. Permanent conflict resolution fora can aid in this process. My point, ultimately, is not that cooperation is a silver bullet, but that it can help. What's more, a revived Rama-Kriol *saneamiento* process can create a national precedent for *saneamiento* implementation. This is of value for the Miskito north, where low-intensity warfare between indigenous peoples and land colonists has become a staple of rural life. There, ethnoterritorialism has reached fever pitch. Those conflicts may soon become unmediatable, if they are not already.

Postface

“The Open Sea”

Jordan had become akin to a brother. We’d sit overlooking Bluefields Lagoon. There was not much else to do. The treeline hid the mouth of the Kukra River. This was a portal to the jungle. Pulsating rivers had become still waters at our perch. They pitched their belongings onto Hone Sound Bar.

Jordan was brave. His ancestors ran with the *turмали*, sacred jaguars. He, himself, had survived an encounter with the water-mare, a malevolent mermaid. He knew every wind, every current, how to fight and fend for himself. This was home.

We both knew that my time had come. I could not survive here without him, I thanked him. He wanted to accompany me to the Pacific. When his mother got word, she begged me to make sure that her boy would be Ok. I told her I would try. But Jordan was a caretaker, and fearless. On the boat to El Rama, he held a tarp against the wind to shield strangers from rain. When I fell asleep at a bus station in Managua, he stood vigil over me.

The city beckoned him. He could not make it on Rama Cay. He wanted a job at a call center. They should hire *costeños*, he told me, because *costeños* speak English from birth. We worked on Standard English grammar together. He kept trying, but failing, to get the job. They seemed to want *mestizos* who spoke “proper” English out of university, he said.

Jordan was a young man who couldn’t pay \$10 US to travel from one end of the country to the other, who had a daughter to raise in this world. The Grand Canal had bankrupted his young love. His marriage could not weather the island feud. We all carry pain. Some are less brave.

It was my quotidian interactions with people like Jordan that gave texture to my experience on Rama Cay. An experience devoid of plot. Like life itself, I explored the smallest details in depth. Theories, frameworks, findings, fine—what struck me most about Ramas was their great humanity. I just want to end on that note.

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